

The early miners & water

Page 86, Bates "Lucky city"

With their heads down in this operation the miners were slow to realise that the key to dirt in large quantities was water.

A map of 1858 shows the miners relied on very small dams for their water supply.

Only when a group of capitalists led by Kirk, an American born Main Rd. tailor, concluded that a system of water supply would be an excellent investment, was water put to work.

In 1857 the Company built a dam on Fellmongers Creek to the north east & constructed races to connect it to sluice boxes & other devises on the field.

Before long the plentiful forest water resources of Ballarat were being prospected with almost as much interest as gold.

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Joint Water Commission

Water was a contentious issue.

The swamp lay in the west, but as it had been developed as the reservoir for the goldfields as a whole for before Ballarat west became a municipality, and as most consumers lived on the flat, its management by the water council was bound to cause friction.

The eastern council quickly asserted its right to share and quickly pressed the government for a water commission like those at Melbourne and Geelong.

With J B Humffrays help the necessary bill was drafted and presented to parliament. They appointed a committee to examine the situation.

This pressure forced Ballarat west to give way, & thus the principal of a water commission was agreed to in 1859.

By July negotiations for supplying Ballarat east from the swamp had been successful.

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In 1867, by arrangement with the penal department a gang of about 20 prisoners in broad arrowed mole skins & grey jumpers marched up daily from the gaol, dragging small carts of picks, spades & axes to gradually clear a pathway around the swamp.

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The prisoners also carted mining debris from Dana Street to build a bank to confine the water in the north-east corner.

The idea was to pump water into the south side near the town, thinking it was better to have a small lake with water than a larger one half empty.

Fortunately the bank was porous & when the rains came the following year no change in the levels occurred.

In 1869, the driest year, elms, oaks, & willows were planted. The rushes were burnt off & the prisoners constructed a dyke, running east and west across the lake bottom, so that when there was a water pump could concentrate it all on the south side nearest the town.

Taken from The Ballarat Historical Society news letter, Vol. 9,
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Councillor Brawn rescued the Water Commission from the
inadequate hands that kept it a mediocre, inept body.

He brought into existence the Moorabool Dam which, in
addition, gives the city a water supply second to none in
Australia.

The splendid achievement, while it ensured the citizens ample
water supply all the year round, provided surplus enough to
keep Lake Wendouree the beautiful scene it is, and, best of all,
provided water for a scheme of water borne sewage that lifted
Ballarat from an insanitation reminiscent of a navy camp.

Taken from Weston Bates "the lucky city"

Although water carriers were encouraged to rush their water
loads to a fire by the promise of premiums for the 1st load
delivered, the first to a fire received the princely sum of 30/-, the
2nd 20/- all others 6/- per load.

Hundreds of loads were delivered to the larger fires until in
1860 when water reticulation boxes appeared along the
footpaths, each containing a hydrant, leather hose and brass
nozzle.