



# Latrobe Valley Social History

Celebrating and recognising  
Latrobe Valley's history and heritage

CONTEXT



Environment,  
Land, Water  
and Planning



## Author

Context

## Report register

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## Photo Credit

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# Acronyms

ACHRIS	Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Register and Information System
ACM	Asbestos-containing materials
ACT	Australian Capital Territory
ACTU	Australian Council of Trade Unions
APM	Australian Paper Manufacturers Ltd
CRB	Country Roads Board
CWA	Country Women's Association
DELWP	Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning
GARDS	Gippsland Asbestos Related Diseases Support Inc.
GIAE	Gippsland Institute of Advanced Education
GLaWAC	The Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation
GTLC	Gippsland Trades and Labour Council
NSW	New South Wales
PROV	Public Record Office Victoria
RFA	Regional Forest Agreement
SEC	State Electricity Commission of Victoria
SLV	State Library Victoria
VHM	<i>Victorian Historical Magazine</i>
YTLC	Yallourn Trades and Labour Council



*Broadbents Map of Victoria, 1940s (source: State Library Victoria Map Collection)*

# Preface

The Latrobe Valley is a regional area of Victoria with a rich and layered past, with many stories of people, places, communities and happenings. The sources for investigating the history of the Valley, both as a region and as a network of places, are many and varied. In drawing on a wide range of sources, this report endeavours to bring together many different views and perspectives of the Latrobe Valley.

The European history of the Latrobe Valley from the early colonial period has been richly documented: there are countless local histories of the towns, hamlets, shires and settlements, and their minutiae — the individual stories of schools, churches, businesses and organisations across the Valley. There are also thematic histories, studies of planning and industry, farming and closer settlement, railways and transport, and coal. There are works exploring Aboriginal history before and after European settlement, notably those by Phillip Pepper, Alfred Howitt and Peter Gardner. A large body of significant work on the history of the wider region has been produced by Meredith Fletcher, Erik Eklund, Julie Fenley, Don Watson, Patrick Morgan, David Langmore, Stephen Legg, and others.

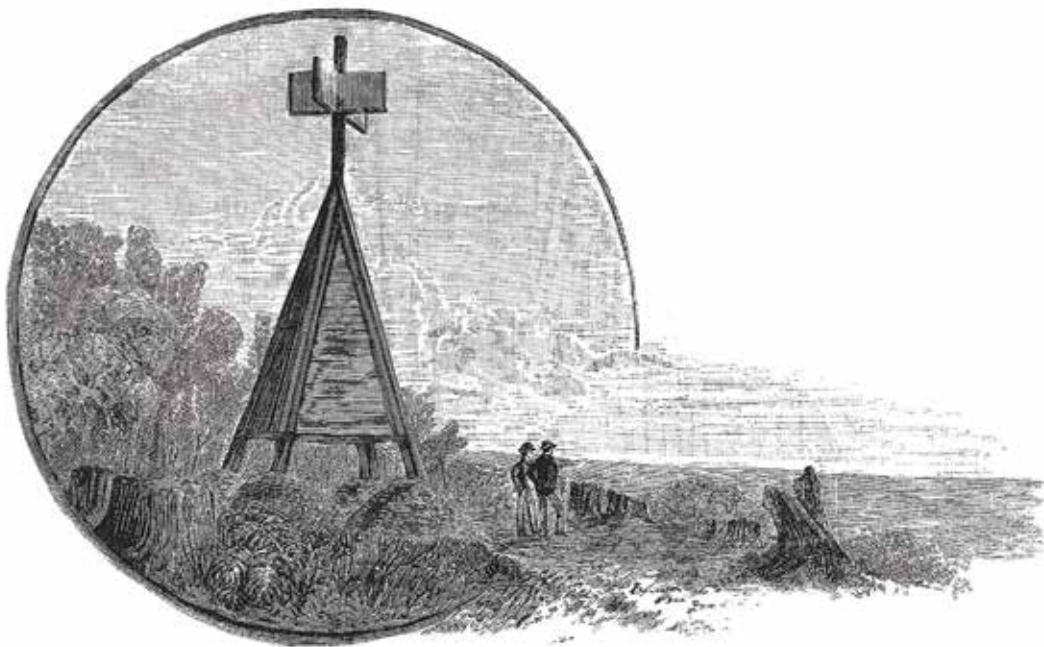
Primary source material includes published journals and diaries, maps and plans, newspaper articles, historic photographs and artworks, and the archives of some of the more significant institutions in the Valley's history. The history of the operations of the State Electricity Commission of Victoria (SEC) has also been amply documented, as has the history of Australian Paper Manufacturers Ltd (APM). There is a large body of statutory, legislative and legal material that includes royal commissions and government inquiries, which relates directly to the

Latrobe Valley and its development, industries, immigration, land and water management, and tragedies in more recent times, such as the extent of asbestos-related disease, the Churchill fire of 2009 and the Hazelwood mine fire of 2014. Similarly, there is an emerging body of work about the Gunaikurnai.

The work of the Centre for Gippsland Studies, located in the Latrobe Valley, in promoting and encouraging the study of local history over several decades, and the broadening of historical understanding gained through the contributions to the *Gippsland Heritage Journal* (1986–2006) has also been significant. The Centre for Gippsland Studies has developed an impressive local history collection, which is now housed in 'The Gippsland and Regional Studies Collection'. The various local historical societies also hold important local records and have supported many publications in local history.

This social history of the Latrobe Valley covers a range of topics. Whilst it is not comprehensive, it endeavours to fill a gap in the available material. It seeks to understand the relationship the people of the Valley have had with this place over time, against the broader background of significant economic and social change and a changing landscape, and the role of people, communities and place in shaping this story. The social history of the Latrobe Valley will continue to be told and retold in different ways in the future, and will continue to be enriched by new voices and perspectives.

A comprehensive Resources Guide forms a companion to this history. This will assist readers, researchers and others in exploring any of these subjects in more detail.



*The view over the Latrobe Valley from the Mt Tanjil trigonometrical station, north of Moe (source: Sutherland 1888, Victoria and its Metropolis, vol. 2, p. 1)*



# Introduction

The Latrobe Valley is a distinct place that has a unique story in Victoria's history. It is a geographic area that is abundantly rich in natural resources and one that thrived as a place of human habitation and endeavour long before the beginning of British colonisation. There is a strong sense of containment about the Latrobe Valley. It has clear boundaries and land-use patterns that mark it as visually distinct and which encouraged particular ways of life: from farming, coal-mining and timber-milling to working on power stations and in factories and living in well-serviced townships. Like all Victorian towns, the towns of the Latrobe Valley have their own sights, sounds and smells, each with a distinctive character that reflects a particular past (while some elements of the past are distinctly missing). It is a place that developed a strong sense of identity — an identity defined by the geography of the Valley itself and its particular patterns of development, which was later reinforced by the communities that became established here.

This social history explores the key stories of the Valley, and the relationships that people of the Valley have had with their locality over time. In the course of this human story of settlement and development, there have been factors that have unified people and forged strong communities, as well as elements of tension and divisiveness. Whilst much of the twentieth-century story of the Latrobe Valley is of remarkable growth and prosperity, primarily through the large-scale expansion of coal-fired energy production, and of model urban centres, it is also a story of challenges and the struggle to survive and prosper, and a story of resilience in the face of hardship. A dominant theme is the close connections that the people of the Valley have with this part of Victoria.

From the 1920s through to the 1970s, the Valley rode a wave of massive, and indeed unprecedented, industrial development and economic prosperity. This was largely due to the role of the SEC in the region, which was far and above the largest employer in the region. The SEC provided the basis for industrial and economic development, high rates of employment, and the social accoutrements that came with a large government-owned operation. It provided various vocational training programs and apprentice schemes, a health service, financial assistance through employee housing provisions, and a credit union. Model urban centres of Yallourn,

Morwell, Moe and Traralgon boasted ample and well-appointed public hospitals, public education (including primary, secondary and tertiary), and an impressive public transport network of rail and buses that connected townships to one another, ferried workers to places of work, and provided services to Melbourne.

The idea of the 'public good' underpinned social life in the Valley. Communities were strong, active and relatively democratic; social privilege was less evident though not entirely absent. Until the 1990s, the services and amenities of the Valley were largely public — either directly government-operated or provided and managed through the SEC. Although a managerial hierarchy existed, this could be accessed through higher education, and was not confined to those with wealth and social standing. Public education was the norm. Whilst there were several Catholic secondary schools in the Valley by the postwar period, there were no major private independent secondary schools apart from a handful of small private schools in Traralgon in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Whilst there were some early established farmhouses, there were no grand and lavish early homesteads of the kind found in the wealthier pastoral districts of Victoria<sup>1</sup>.

There is a myriad of stories that could be included in a social history of the Latrobe Valley and stories of the past could be told in many different, and sometimes conflicting ways. Any view on the past is necessarily subjective, and the recent past in particular is heavily weighted in the politics of the present. Prevailing social and political issues, such as employment, unionism, industrial development, immigration, feminism and the environment have also shaped the ways in which social history is told. This history is an account of a regional community, or group of communities, in a particular place, told at a particular moment in history. Whilst the 'big picture' of macro social and economic development in the Latrobe Valley prevails as the underlying story, local history is an expression of individual stories and voices that sometimes run counter to the main narrative, and tell of challenges, hardship and loss. Casting a wide net across a wide body of research has allowed a variety of different voices to be heard. The Latrobe Valley is presently at a point of significant transition as the mainstay of coal-fired power stations are being decommissioned and the timber industry is also facing an uncertain future.

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1 E.M. West 1978, 'Early Traralgon Private Schools', *Morwell Historical News*, vol. 9, no. 4, September 1978.





# 01

## Chapter 1: Land and Water

The history of a place is deeply connected to the land and physical environment. This chapter traces the origins of the Latrobe Valley in deep time: how this area supported lush forests during the time of Gondwana which, over millennia, became the rich coal seams that formed the basis of the coal industry, and how this in turn enabled the region's extraordinary large-scale industrial and economic expansion through the twentieth century. It looks at how the Valley has been shaped in many ways as a cultural landscape, through the heritage of the living ancient culture of the Gunaikurnai, and was imprinted with the histories of its people and many diverse communities. It examines how the land has both shaped, and been shaped by, human experience and endeavour. It considers the ways in which the land has posed opportunities and challenges; and how it has been accessed and transformed in sometimes dramatic ways.



The Latrobe Valley in south-east Victoria extends broadly from Moe in the west to Traralgon in the east. Geographically, the Valley derives from and was shaped by the Latrobe River, which flows from west to east, between the Baw Baw Ranges to the north and the Strzelecki Ranges to the south. As such, the Valley is linear and is broader from east to west than it is from north to south. This river is 270 kilometres long, with a descent of three-quarters of a kilometre from the north-west near Powelltown in the Yarra State Forest. The river flows downstream towards Moe, where it shifts course eastwards, then passes through Morwell, Traralgon, Flynn and Rosedale, before continuing eastwards and spilling into Lake Wellington. The other major river is the Thomson River, but subsidiary waterways include the Tanjil, Tyers, Morwell and Moe rivers, and the Traralgon and Narracan creeks<sup>1</sup>. South of the Latrobe River, the Valley extends as far south as Boolarra, Yinnar and Mirboo North.

For tens of thousands of years, the Latrobe Valley and the wider Gippsland area has been the province of the Gunaikurnai people, who call themselves the Gunaikurnai. The Gunaikurnai named the river, the valley and other important landforms, and these features hold special cultural significance. The Valley's earliest colonial history is hazy and undocumented. It may have begun with unknown British or American adventurers in the 1790s or early 1800s, who possibly traipsed inland from whaling and sealing camps. Its recorded history begins with the arrival of English, Scottish and Irish squatters to the area in the early 1840s.

While the geographic place we now know as the Latrobe Valley had its origins millions of years ago, the name 'Latrobe' was not bestowed until the 1840s. The Gunaikurnai called the river *Durt yowan*<sup>2</sup>. Nostalgic Scottish settlers, who arrived in the area in the 1840s, had named the river Glengarry, after a Scottish glen and clan name. This was replaced shortly afterwards with the name 'Latrobe' (after C.J. La Trobe, superintendent of the Port Phillip District from 1839), but the earlier name 'Glengarry' lingered into the 1880s, preferred by the old residents<sup>3</sup>.

Definitions of the Latrobe Valley are multiple and varied. The term 'Latrobe Valley' came into greater usage in the 1950s, when the region was undergoing significant industrial development. Today, it is a place generally understood to be that contained by the municipal boundaries of the present-day Latrobe City Council. What the Valley means to people can be defined in terms of industry and employment, particularly the dominance of coal-powered electricity generation, but meanings can also be informed by personal experiences and ideas, by visual images and by popular culture. Sometimes the Valley is simply a place people travel through on their way to somewhere else.

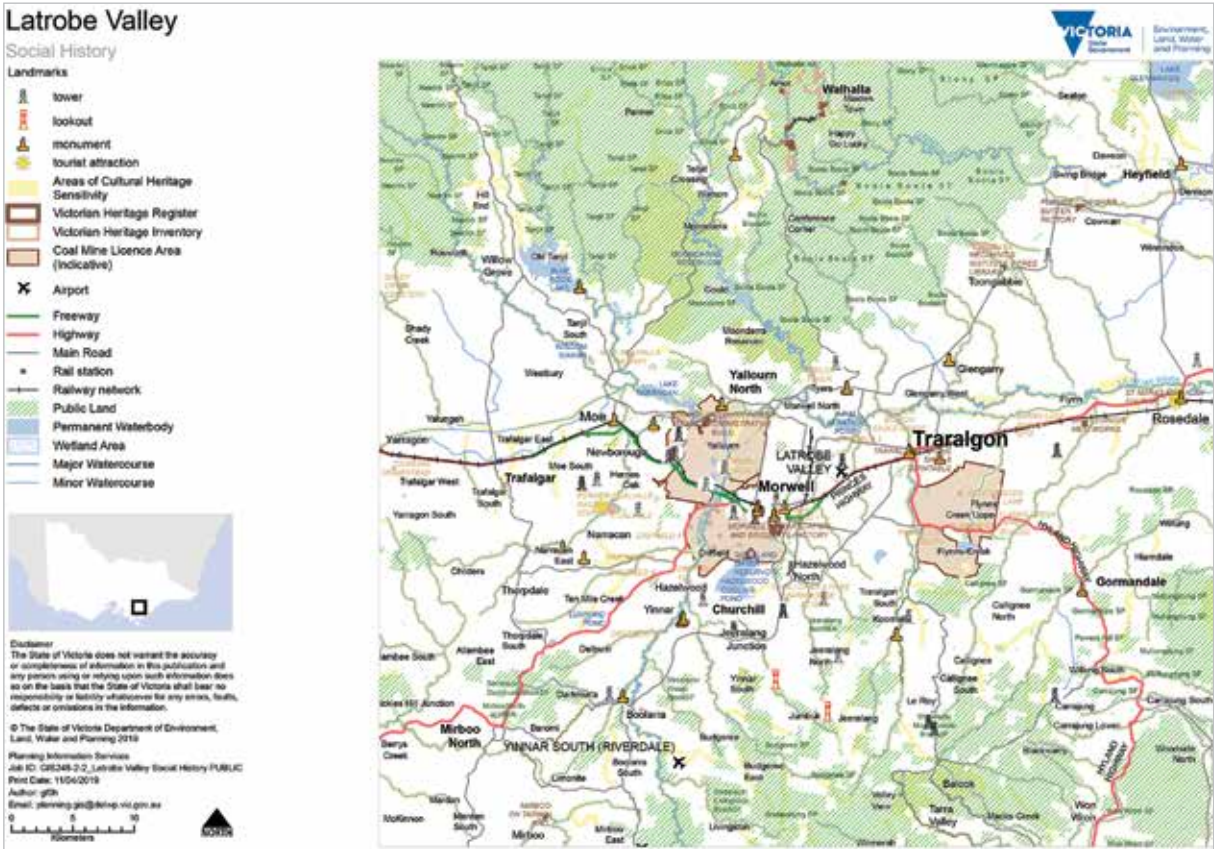
The land can be understood from many different perspectives — as a collection of topographical features; as a landscape; and in terms of available resources and land-use patterns. Land can also be understood as both public and private space — it has a broad social role that involves public responsibilities and opportunities, but it can also be a personal and intimate space. The concept of 'place' has an important role in the history of Latrobe Valley. Special places with their particular meanings, parameters, characteristics and stories have helped to foster and shape local identity and to strengthen community connections. The loss of land and the loss of place has been a recurrent theme in the Valley, which has prompted a range of responses, including a desire to record connections to lost places, and, in the case of the Gunaikurnai, to rebuild and strengthen connections to the land that they were removed from.

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1 West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority, Latrobe River: <https://www.wgcma.vic.gov.au/our-region/waterways/introducing-our-waterways/latrobe-river> (accessed 6 July 2018).

2 Robert Brough Smyth 1878, *The Aborigines of Victoria*, vol. II, John Ferres, Government Printer, Melbourne, p. 36.

3 *Gippsland Farmers' Journal*, 6 February 1888.



The Latrobe Valley (source: DELWP 2019)

## Evolution of a landscape

In the far distant past, some 380 million years ago, the Latrobe Valley was part of the floor of a deep ocean that was rich with marine life. To the north of this ocean, the continent of Gondwana gradually began to move southward. About 160 to 96 million years ago, Australia and Antarctica began to split apart. Eventually a large basin was formed, known as the Gippsland Basin, which became filled with a large quantity of silts deposited by rivers and lakes to a depth of 3000 metres. Further drifting of the continent eventually formed the Latrobe Valley depression, which developed into extensive swamps and wetlands. About 23 million years ago, the great forests that still exist today grew up the sides of the valley and in and around the swamps<sup>4</sup>.

These damp forests provided plenty of organic vegetable matter that fell to the floor of the wetlands. Over time, this matter decayed and became peat. Over millions of years, the peat was subjected to pressure and heat from subsequent layers of organic matter that became yet more peat, and these layers of peat were eventually transformed into brown coal (or lignite). Coal 'beds' or 'seams' can be as thin as a few millimetres or as thick as many metres and are separated by thick layers of shale or sandstone. The Latrobe Valley's coal seams are very thick, at around 80 metres, but are also shallow with very little overburden (the layer of earth or clay between the coal and the ground surface), and limited inter-seam material. This makes them particularly easy to mine and unique amongst other brown coal seams globally. As coal ages and becomes harder, its water content decreases

and its carbon content increases. Brown coal, which is younger than black coal, has a higher water content and hence burns less easily<sup>5</sup>. These ancient geological processes are evident today in the open-cut brown coal mines at Hazelwood, Yallourn and Loy Yang and in their overburden sediments.

As Antarctica moved further away from Australia, the stresses caused by the separation resulted in the formation of the Strzelecki Ranges to the south of the Latrobe Valley. The South Eastern Highlands of Victoria, New South Wales and the ACT, which encompass the Great Dividing Range to the north of the Valley, rose up about five million years ago and an extensive river system developed over the dry land areas. These rivers developed deep channels that became filled with gravels, and as the uplands became further eroded the rivers draining them reduced and slowed, depositing fine-grained sediments over the coarser gravels and creating the Gippsland Plains. Between 65 and 2.6 million years ago, extensive lava flows occurred within many of the valleys in South Gippsland, burying the low-lying peat and coal deeper beneath the ground. In the most recent geological period, the Quaternary, which began 1.6 million years ago, several ice ages occurred, reducing the surrounding sea level and alternating with warmer periods, much like today's<sup>6</sup>. Over time, this warming and cooling led to changes in sea level of as much as 100 to 150 metres, which caused coastlines to flood, and created Bass Strait and Port Phillip Bay around 9000 years ago<sup>7</sup>.

4 William D. Birch (ed.) 2003, *Geology of Victoria*, Special Publication, Geological Society of Australia, 23, Geological Society of Australia (Victorian Division), Sydney, pp. 499–505.

5 'Coal: Fact Sheet', [http://www.australianminesatlas.gov.au/education/fact\\_sheets/coal.html](http://www.australianminesatlas.gov.au/education/fact_sheets/coal.html) (accessed 31 May 2018); 'Brown coal – Lignite': [http://www.minerals.org.au/file\\_upload/files/resources/victoria/minerals\\_fact\\_sheets/Minerals\\_-\\_Fact\\_Sheets\\_-\\_Brown\\_Coal\\_-\\_Lignite.pdf](http://www.minerals.org.au/file_upload/files/resources/victoria/minerals_fact_sheets/Minerals_-_Fact_Sheets_-_Brown_Coal_-_Lignite.pdf) (accessed 31 May 2018); John Long, 'Coal's formation is a window on an ancient world', *The Conversation*, 8 June 2016.

6 Agriculture Victoria 2017.

7 Richard Broome 2005, *Aboriginal Victorians: A history since 1800*. Allen & Unwin, Sydney, p. xviii.



The original vegetation of the Gippsland Basin bioregion varied according to the amount of rainfall it received. Lowland forest and grassy woodland or swamp scrub mosaics grew in the humid areas and plain grassy woodlands in drier areas<sup>8</sup>. Open Eucalypt forest and woodlands dominated the bioregion and supported unique grasslands across the plains<sup>9</sup>. To the south of the Latrobe Valley in the Tarra–Bulga National Park, protected for its ‘remnant plant communities, faunal habitats and visual landscapes’<sup>10</sup>, there is a giant Myrtle Beech (*Nothofagus cunninghamii*) thought to have a root system as old as 1000 years. Its original trunk has died but new shoots have since taken over. The current tree is about 40 metres high with a girth of about 9 metres and a spread of about 20 metres, leaving one to wonder how large the original tree would have been if it were still alive. As one of the more ancient trees in this national park it has become host to other species and two Southern Sassafras (*Atherosperma moschatum*) have germinated on its trunk<sup>11</sup>. Here, Mountain Ash (*Eucalyptus regnans*) is also plentiful, just as it once had been in the wider Ash Range that incorporates the north side of the Latrobe Valley. These trees can reach gigantic heights and when Europeans first came to the region they were awestruck by the size of the trees but to successfully fell a forest giant was regarded as a trophy. A sign near Thorpdale in the Strzelecki Ranges recalls the former site of ‘the world’s tallest tree’, which had stood at 114 metres high in 1881 before being felled. Today, visitors are encouraged to walk from this sign to a ‘white post near the fence on the south side of the road’ to reach its imaginary height.<sup>12</sup>

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8 Agriculture Victoria 2017.

9 Agriculture Victoria 2017.

10 ‘Bulga and Tarra Valley National Park’: <http://vhd.heritagecouncil.vic.gov.au/places/70485> (accessed 6 May 2018).

11 ‘*Nothofagus cunninghamii* (Myrtle Beech), Tarra–Bulga National Park’. Statement of Significance, June 8, 2004. <http://vhd.heritagecouncil.vic.gov.au/places/70761> (accessed 20 June 2018).

12 Tom Griffiths 1992, *Secrets of the Forest*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, pp. 7–8.

## Ancient land, ancient culture

Over many thousands of years, the Gunaikurnai relied on a deep understanding of and an intimate connection to the natural cycles of the land and climate. In Gunaikurnai tradition, people are created from the land and are at one with the land itself. Identity relied on family, clan, Country and knowledge.

Gunaikurnai ancestral stories tell of the arrival of their people into Gippsland. One tells of the pelican Borun, who was travelling alone for a long time and carrying his canoe from the mountains down to Tarra Warackel (Port Albert) on the coast. From far away he heard a *tap, tap, tap*. He continued to follow the sound over the mountains, through the forests and along the rivers, all the while creating songlines as he went. Eventually, he came to the water and found a female musk duck named Tuk. The two water birds Borun and Tuk were married and had five clans of children, who represent the five clans of the Gunaikurnai: the Brabralung, Brataualung, Brayakaulung, Krauatungalung and Tatungalung. The Brayakaulung, or 'men belonging to the west', is the clan most closely associated with the Latrobe Valley<sup>13</sup>. Alfred Howitt recorded a slightly different version of this story: 'that the first Kurnai man marched across the country from the north-west, bearing on his head a bark canoe in which was his wife Tuk, that is the Musk-duck, he being Borun, the Pelican'<sup>14</sup>.

Scientific research into changes to the land and sea levels through deep time resonates with Gunaikurnai Dreaming stories. The story of Tiddalik, the water-holding frog, who expels a deluge of water when he is made to laugh (or sneeze), tells of a dramatic change in water levels and water movement across the Valley that occurred long ago. This story quite likely relates to the end of the last ice age, around 9000 years ago, when there was dramatic sea level rise that inundated the coastline of southern Australia<sup>15</sup>. Tiddalik is believed to represent the Water-holding Frog (*Cyclorana platycephala*), or an ancestor of this species, that now lives in arid regions of northern Australia and stores water in its body for times of drought. This frog can be squeezed to instantly release the water out of its mouth for human use, but has not been seen in south-eastern Australia for a very long time.

While there are many variations of the Tiddalik story across south-eastern Australia, the Gunaikurnai version is the most calamitous, telling of vast quantities of water being released, causing many people to drown. It tells how some parts of the coast on higher ground became islands, including Snake Island, Sunday Island, St Margaret Island, and several others today dotted between Port Albert and Port Welshpool<sup>16</sup>. The Tiddalik story can be read as a memory of a great and significant flood, of the creation of waterways across the Gippsland bioregion, of the emergence of many small islands along the coastline, and of the changes that took place in geological time during the last melting of the icecaps<sup>17</sup>.

Different versions of the Tiddalik story were recorded in the nineteenth century — for example, by the missionary John Bulmer, the pastoralist E.M. Curr, and by the amateur ethnographers and anthropologists Robert Brough Smyth and Alfred Howitt<sup>18</sup>. When he was a young boy in the early 1900s, the Kurnai elder Phillip Pepper was told a variation of this story by his grandmother, Granny Connolly (Louise Clarke), which related to a particular waterhole at Seaspray:

*A long time ago there was a big frog lived at the hole and some of the Aborigines got that frog real wild with them, so he paid them back and drank up all the water. The tribesmen got the clever bloke again, bugheen, and went to the empty hole with the people. Anyway, he picked up a red hot firestick and he stuck it in the mouth of one of the tribesmen and he said to 'im. "You fly away as a black cockatoo" and off the blackfella flew, a black cockatoo. See bugheen was trying to make the frog laugh, so he'd spill out the water he'd drunk. That didn't work, the old frog just sat watchin' all this, so the hugheen got some white ash on the end of the firestick and he put it on another Aborigine's mouth and he said to him, "You fly away like a white cockatoo" and away he flew. The big frog laughed and laughed, thinkin' that he was so funny, he just bursted his stomach and all the water came out his mouth and stomach and filled the hole...'<sup>19</sup>*

13 'GunaiKurnai' <https://www.deadlystore.com/page/aboriginal-country-map/aboriginal-country/gunaikurnai> (accessed 23 June 2018).

14 A.W. Howitt 1904, *The Native Tribes of South-East Australia*, Macmillan, London, p. 485.

15 <https://www.gunaikurnai.com.au/about/our-people> (accessed 20 June 2018).

16 John Morton, 'Who is Tiddalik?', <https://frogs.org.au/vfg/features/whoistiddalik.php> (accessed 20 June 2018).

17 Morton, 'Who is Tiddalik?'.

18 Morton, 'Who is Tiddalik?'. For an account by E.M. Curr, see *Traralgon Record*, 22 June 1888, p. 3.

19 This story has a long oral tradition but was not documented until the 1980s; see Phillip Pepper with Tess De Araugo 1989, *You Are What You Make Yourself To Be: The story of a Victorian Aboriginal family 1842–1980* (first published 1980), pp. 33–34. The name Louise Clarke was identified through a family tree accessible through Ancestry (<http://www.ancestry.com.au>).

Phillip Pepper explained that his grandmother's people, who were based near the coast at Seaspray, had a wide territory that extended west into the Latrobe Valley<sup>20</sup>.

Other ancestral stories also refer to the inundation of the land in ages past. Howitt retold the Gunaikurnai account of the supernatural figure of Mungan, who responded to the bad behaviour of humans by punitive actions, including sending a vast fire that 'filled the whole space between the earth and the sky' so that 'men went mad with fear'. After this 'the sea rushed over the land and nearly all mankind was drowned' and those who survived became the ancestors of the Kurnai<sup>21</sup>.

Two of the Gunaikurnai clans, the Brayakaulung and Brataualung, identified with the Latrobe Valley — the Brayaks on the north of the river and the Bratau on the south side<sup>22</sup>. However, these clans were most likely not constrained by definitive boundaries and there was some movement of these clans into neighbouring territories as well as the periodic incursion of neighbouring clans into the Latrobe Valley.

The Gunaikurnai clans moved regularly through their country according to the seasons, living lightly on the land and returning periodically to familiar camping places. Their movements relied on the availability of different foods and resources, and the need to fulfil their cultural obligations. They constructed shelters using sheets of bark, boughs and stringybark rope. They established camps along the rivers and swamps where food and water were plentiful. Some of the Gunaikurnai were fearful of the alpine region to the north and avoided this area. However, others trekked annually to the mountains during high summer to feast on the Bogong Moth (*Agrotis infusa*), which were nutritious, with a high fat content, and easy to catch<sup>23</sup>. Howitt noted that a large area of land lying between the Latrobe and the Yarra rivers, and extending from the sources of the rivers to the coast — and part of the territory of the Brayataulung — was known by the Kurnai as *Wea-wuk* or the 'Bad Country', but Howitt gives no reason why this was so-named<sup>24</sup>.



GUM-TREE, ITS BARK CUT OUT FOR NATIVE CANOE.

*Scarred tree, Gippsland* (source: Alexander Sutherland 1888, *Victoria and Its Metropolis*: vol. 2)

The Latrobe River and other waterways were critical to the Gunaikurnai. They provided a wide range of reliable food sources through most of the year, and also enabled trade and transport opportunities. The rivers, creeks, lagoons and swamp areas, such as Sheepwash Creek and its tributaries, supported various types of fish, eels, freshwater mussels and other shellfish, frogs, tortoises, waterbirds, and lizards, while various birds as well as kangaroos, wallabies, wombats, possums and emus inhabited the plains and woodland. The rivers and creeks supported water rushes and marsh vegetation as well as a number of plant foods that were important to Aboriginal people. Swamps and wetlands also attracted a range of waterfowl, including ducks and black swans, which provided meat and eggs.

20 Pepper 1989, p. 34.

21 Howitt 1904, pp. 493, 630.

22 Howitt 1904, pp. 76–77.

23 Commonwealth of Australia 2000, National Estate Identification and Assessment in the Gippsland Region of Victoria, Commonwealth and Victorian Regional Forest Agreement (RFA) Steering Committee, Canberra, p. 8.

24 Howitt 1904, p. 403.





Bone fish hooks were unique to the Gunaikurnai (source: Robert Brough Smyth 1878, *The Aborigines of Victoria*, vol. 1)

The Gunaikurnai sojourned to the lakes and coastal areas at certain times to obtain particular types of fish, eel, birds and birds' eggs, and plant foods. The most common food was kangaroo, but possums, wombats, emus, koalas, echidnas, goannas, frogs, ducks, swans, gulls, pelicans, spoonbills, cormorants and sea eagles were also eaten. From the ocean, lakes, rivers, creeks and waterholes they caught eel, blackfish, flounder, mullet, snapper, garfish, perch and other varieties of fish<sup>25</sup>. The Gunaikurnai used their tree-climbing skills to catch possums and koalas, and developed sophisticated fishing techniques, including the use of bone fish hooks, which are not known to have been used by Aboriginal people elsewhere in Victoria<sup>26</sup>. Various parts of different plants were eaten, including leaves, roots, bulbs, fruit and resin. The timber from forest trees had many important uses. River Red Gum or Stringybark was used to make canoes, which made use of the dozens of waterways and lakes that offered easier travel than the dense forests, steep hills and vales. Timber was also used to erect shelters, and to shape a range of weapons and implements, and bark was used to

make water-carrying vessels<sup>27</sup>. Plants were also used for medicine and for non-culinary purposes, such as fibre for the purpose of making nets, baskets and ornaments. Kangaroo Grass (*Themeda triandra*) was used in the manufacture of fishing nets, while tussock grass was used to make string for bags, baskets and mats<sup>28</sup>.

Aboriginal people managed their resources with great care and economy, which included the practice of firing the ground to stimulate the new growth of grasslands for grazing and of other plant foods that formed part of their diet. In cultivating the land Historian Bruce Pascoe explains how Aboriginal people

used fire to clear areas of land, which they were careful to separate with belts of timber. Like our contemporary farmers, Aboriginals left the forest on poorer soils and cleared the best soils so they could create pastures and croplands<sup>29</sup>.

Pascoe recounts, 'Old settler families of north-east Gippsland have told me that when their forefathers were shown the country by Aboriginal people in the 1840s all the plains were clean and well grassed, including the narrow river valleys'<sup>30</sup>. Former convict Robert Alexander was taught by Jinoor Jack, a Bidwell-Maap man, that in the Genoa Valley of East Gippsland in the summer he should burn every five years 'after the longest day when the sap begins to go down. In that period there are westerly winds in the morning that change to northeast in the afternoon, which provide natural back burn'<sup>31</sup>. Pastoral settler W.A. Brodribb, travelling from Port Albert to Lake Wellington (outside the study area) in 1841, also noted that the grass had been fired in the late summer and that the new growth was very green as a result<sup>32</sup>. This seasonal, low-level burning opened up the bush and made it easier to travel through, but also managed forest growth and prevented major bush fires from taking over. However, as Pascoe points out, 'within years of Aboriginal people being prevented from operating their traditional fire regimes [by European settlers] the countryside was overwhelmed by understorey species'<sup>33</sup>.

25 Gunaikurnai Whole-of-Country Plan, pp. 10–11; Pauline Brightling 1994, 'Images of Ganai Life'.

26 Aldo Massola 1956, 'Australian Fish Hooks and their Distribution', Museum of Victoria.

27 Brough Smyth 1878, vol. 1, p. 349.

28 Brightling 1994, 'Images of Ganai Life', p. 13.

29 Bruce Pascoe 2014, *Dark Emu: Black seeds. Agriculture or accident?*, Magdala Books, Broome, p. 26.

30 Pascoe 2014, p. 117.

31 Pascoe 2014, pp. 118–19, citing N. O'Connor and K. Jones 2003, *A Journey Through Time*, p. 17.

32 Brodribb 1841, cited in Meredith Fletcher 1992, *Strathfieldsaye: A history and a guide*, Centre for Gippsland Studies, Churchill, pp. 6–7.

33 Pascoe 2014, p. 117.

The Latrobe Valley, having evolved in its geological and topographical form over millennia, has also for thousands of years carried the physical imprints of Aboriginal occupation and activity. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries settlers often uncovered the remains of earlier Aboriginal occupation, including stone tools and skeletal remains<sup>34</sup>. Disturbances to the ground — through the work of timber-cutting, building roads and railways, draining swamps, and most dramatically through large-scale open-cut mining — sometimes led to the discovery of Aboriginal cultural objects. During the draining of the Moe Swamp in 1887, for instance, an Aboriginal stone axe was found<sup>35</sup>. As late as 1909, a resident of Thorpdale South came across an abandoned Aboriginal camp in the forest, where he found polished axes, grindstones, and polishing and pounding tools<sup>36</sup>. Through the twentieth century, tangible evidence of Aboriginal culture became scarce as so much of the land had been disturbed by grazing, farming, timber-cutting and coal-mining. Yet there remains a rich archaeological record in the Latrobe Valley today. Physical evidence of Aboriginal occupation includes scarred trees, quarries, grinding stone and artefact scatters<sup>37</sup>. These items are both a reminder of an ancient culture and of a shared cultural landscape.

In 2018, 82 flaked stone tools, believed to be up to 40,000 years old, were found during works to duplicate the Princes Highway at Flynn, which lies east of Traralgon in the Latrobe Valley. These significant objects have been carefully documented and will be analysed by Gunaikurnai Traditional Owners before being reburied near a local scarred tree. Stephen Hood from the Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation (GLaWAC) explains that the analysis and repatriation of found objects helps to give 'us an understanding of how long our ancestors have been in this area and where they travelled. Eventually it's all going to link up and by the time my kids are our age it will be a part of our stories'. These are in addition to the thousand-plus artefacts found around Tyers Creek and the Moondarra State Park, and another 500 around

Traralgon and Sale<sup>38</sup>. It is presumed that Aboriginal occupation in the resource-rich region of Gippsland would be significantly older than this, given that other archaeological deposits in coastal Victoria have been dated at 60,000 years old.

Many place names in the Latrobe Valley are adapted from Gunaikurnai language. The Latrobe River itself was thought to be called Tanjil in Braiakaulung and Tatungalung language, whilst Robert Brough Smyth, informed by Howitt, claimed it was known as Durt yowan, meaning 'finger'<sup>39</sup>. The parish was the smallest parcel of land used by the colonial authorities from the 1840s to administer land tenure in Victoria, and it was a standard policy of Robert Hoddle, the chief surveyor, to adopt local Aboriginal names to identify parishes. In this way, some record of Aboriginal language and Aboriginal place-meanings in the Valley has survived, albeit imperfectly, in these jigsaw-puzzle pieces of land. Parish names (with their English meanings) include: Moe ('swamp'), Jeeralang ('star'), Loy Yang ('place of big conger eel'), Traralgon ('river of little fish'), Narracan (cow?), Yinnar ('woman or women'), Moondarra ('rain or thunder'), Toongabbie ('a place near water'), Boola Boola, Tanjil, and Numbruk. Other local names include Boolarra (plenty), Darlimurla (Stony Creek)<sup>40</sup>. Only two parish names in the Valley were non-Indigenous — 'Maryvale' and 'Hazelwood' — and these had both derived from pastoral run names. Many Aboriginal parish names also became the names of settlements and towns. Morwell, although not a parish, was also a local Aboriginal word (meaning 'woolly possum')<sup>41</sup>.

In 1920, two Aboriginal words were used to create the new name of Yallourn: yalleen (meaning 'brown') and lourn (meaning 'smoke or fire'), although the two words and their respective meanings were consistently mis-matched in the newspaper accounts of the time. This new place name was suggested by A.S. Kenyon, and approved by Professor Baldwin Spencer who was regarded at the time as an expert on Aboriginal languages, however contemporary reports do not

34 For example, an Aboriginal skull was found at Morwell railway reserve in 1892, *Gippsland Farmers' Journal*, 16 December 1892. A skeleton believed to be that of an Aboriginal woman was found at 'Holey Plains' in 1905 (Morwell Advertiser, 22 September 1905, p. 2).

35 *Advocate*, 24 September 1887, p. 18.

36 *Morwell Advertiser*, 23 July 1909, p. 2.

37 Aboriginal Victoria, ACHRIS database, searched October 2018.

38 Kellie Lazzaro 2018, 'Scores of Aboriginal stone tool discovered in Gippsland during sewer dig', ABC Gippsland, 4 May 2018: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-05-04/aboriginal-stone-tools-found-in-gippsland-during-sewer-dig/9722718>

39 Brough Smyth 1878, vol. II, p. 190.

40 Les Blake 1973, *Place Names of Victoria*, various pages; C.I. Du Ve 1914, 'Nomenclature etc. of Some Gippsland Towns', *Gippsland Farmers' Journal*, 29 May 1914, p. 4. R.K. Whitehead 1974, *The Morwell and Mirboo Railway*, p. 32; Brough Smyth 1878, vol. II, pp. 191, 205; Graham Goulding 2015, *A Walk Through Gippsland History*, p. 18. Much work is being done by the Victorian Aboriginal Corporation for Languages (VACL) and in Aboriginal communities across Victoria and Australia to recover and re-establish languages.

41 Goulding 2015, p. 18.

state from which Aboriginal language Kenyon had taken these two words<sup>42</sup>. According to John Green, superintendent at Coranderrk Aboriginal Reeser in the 1870s, the word yalleen meant 'brown' in the Woi-wurrung language of the 'Yarra Tribe'. The word lourn was given to mean 'coal' by the 'two Melbourne tribes', according to a report on Aboriginal language prepared by William Thomas in 1858<sup>43</sup>. These two words were borrowed from the Woi wurrung and Bunurong languages for use in Gunaikurnai country; it is not known how much effort was made to find suitable local words from the Gunaikurnai languages. The choice of the name Yallourn is a rare and possibly unique example in Victoria of a place being given an invented or constructed Aboriginal placename in order to convey a non-Indigenous function.

There is no documented word for 'coal' in Howitt's records of Gunaikurnai languages, and there appears to be no archaeological evidence that the Gunaikurnai had a tradition of using coal. Given that it would have been visible on the ground and in creek beds presumably over tens of thousands of years of Aboriginal occupation, it seems almost impossible that coal was unknown to Aboriginal people in the Latrobe Valley. Their neighbours, the Wurundjeri, did have a word for coal, 'lourn'. Perhaps coal was intentionally left alone in the Latrobe Valley, as was the case in the Hunter region of NSW, where Aboriginal people avoided it because it was associated with a 'fiery, unstable and grieving landscape'<sup>44</sup>.

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42 *Morwell Advertiser*, 3 December 1920, p. 2; *Weekly Times*, 18 November 1922, p. 10; Meredith Fletcher 2002, *Digging People Up for Coal*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, p. 7.

43 Brough Smyth 1878, vol. II, pp. 99, 123; Thomas lists the word 'lourn' in the *Report of the Select Committee on the Aborigines*, 1858, p. 94. Note that the 'two Melbourne tribes' includes the Bunurong.

44 Reference to the Hunter region of NSW comes from Linda H. Connor 2016, *Climate Change and Anthropos: Planet, people and places*, Routledge, Abington and New York, p. 46.

## Newcomers

In the immediate decades after the British had established convict settlements on the eastern coasts of New South Wales (1788) and Van Diemen's Land (1803), only a small number of British and other foreigners visited the remote south-east coast. These included British settlers at Corinella Bay on Westernport in 1826, and regular seasonal visits from English and American sealers and whalers. Long before these newcomers ventured into the Latrobe Valley, the Gunaikurnai had obtained advance warning of their arrival along the coast and 'the strange sight of ships sailing past their shores'<sup>45</sup>. Coastal people relayed these stories to the Gunaikurnai living in the Latrobe Valley using carved timber message sticks.

Permanent British settlers arrived at Port Phillip in the mid-1830s. In 1835 land-grabbers from Tasmania settled on the site of Melbourne on the Yarra River and this triggered the NSW government to officially sanction a new district of permitted settlement in 1836. It wasn't long before growing numbers of fortune-seekers arrived to take up land and establish a new life for themselves. By May 1836, there were 177 European settlers with 26,000 sheep at Port Phillip. Apart from John Batman's dubious 'treaty' with the Kulin elders, settlement proceeded with barely even a feigned effort to obtain permission from the Aboriginal occupants<sup>46</sup>.

A few years later, pastoralists seeking new grazing lands reached Gippsland and the Latrobe Valley via the coast at Port Albert to the south, and from the Monaro to the north. The vast Koo-Wee-Rup Swamp and dense forest immediately west of the Valley formed a physical barrier and made a direct route from Melbourne very difficult, if not impossible. Many of the first wave of arrivals were Scottish. In 1839, Scottish patriot Angus McMillan, guided by a Ngarigo man called Jemmy Gibber and later with two Jaitmatung guides from Omeo, made their way with difficulty from the Monaro district and through the Gippsland forests to search for a route to the southern coast and Port Albert. McMillan was employed by Lachlan Macalister, an expatriate Scottish Highland chieftain who was in

search of a large pastoral estate. Upon reaching the top of a hill, near what is now the Mitchell River National Park, McMillan named all the land before him 'Caledonia Australis' in honour of his homeland. Further south, he claimed a pastoral run for himself and named it 'Bushy Park' before returning to New South Wales. McMillan was proud of his efforts in 'discovering' the fine country of Gippsland. When in 1841 he finally 'discovered the present shipping place at Port Albert with seven feet of water at low tide', he celebrated by marking a tree and cutting his name into it. In his own account of his 'discoveries', he declared: 'From this time numerous [pastoral] stations were formed, and a prosperous future for Gippsland assured. I marked the dray road all the way from Port Albert to Numbla Mungee'<sup>47</sup>. He wrote with great satisfaction: 'Having found this fine country, I now found the key to it'<sup>48</sup>.

Shortly after McMillan's expedition, the Polish adventurer Paul Strzelecki, on orders from the NSW Survey Office, made his way from the Monaro and through rugged forest into Gippsland with the help of Aboriginal guide Charley Tarra. Making use of the track that McMillan and his team had used, they headed for Westernport. It was an arduous journey and a near failure; the terrain was so rough that the horses were abandoned near Boolarra and the men were forced to proceed on foot. Without a ready supply of koala (kullah) meat provided by skilled hunter Charley Tarra, Strzelecki would have starved to death in the forests of Gippsland and never reached Westernport<sup>49</sup>. In deference to the colonial authorities, Strzelecki named the district 'Gipp's Land' after the Governor of New South Wales, Sir George Gipps, but in an effort to stake his own authority over the place McMillan subsequently recorded in his diary that 'at the Count's suggestion, I altered the name of the new country from Caledonia Australia [sic.] to Gippsland'<sup>50</sup>. Strzelecki's name is remembered in the mountain ranges the south of the Latrobe Valley and Charley Tarra is recognised in the naming of the Tarra River and the Tarra-Bulga National Park.

45 Howitt 1904, p. 444.

46 Richard Broome 1984, *Arriving*, Fairfax, Syme & Weldon, McMahon's Point (NSW), p. 20.

47 McMillan, excerpt from his diaries in Richard Mackay 1916, *Recollections of Early Gippsland Goldfields*, Appendix, W. Chappell, Traralgon, p. 82.

48 Angus McMillan, excerpt from his diaries in Mackay 1916, Appendix, p. 82.

49 'Boolarra', Victorian Places: <http://www.victorianplaces.com.au/boolarra> (accessed 6 June 2018). South Gippsland Pioneers' Association 1966, *The Land of the Lyre Bird: A story of early settlement in the great forest of Gippsland*; 'Tanjil' (John King) 1886, *Our Guide to the Gippsland Lakes and Rivers*, p. 18. See Strzelecki's account in James Bonwick 1884, *Port Phillip Settlement*. Brough Smyth 1878, vol. II, p. 37 records that *kullah* or *koola* was the word for 'native bear' in the Gippsland language.

50 Cheryl Glowrey 2017, 'McMillan, Angus (1810–1865)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography* online (accessed 26 June 2018); Helen Heney, 'Strzelecki, Sir Paul Edmund de (1797–1873)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography* online (accessed 26 June 2018); McMillan, excerpt from his diaries in Mackay 1916, Appendix, p. 81.

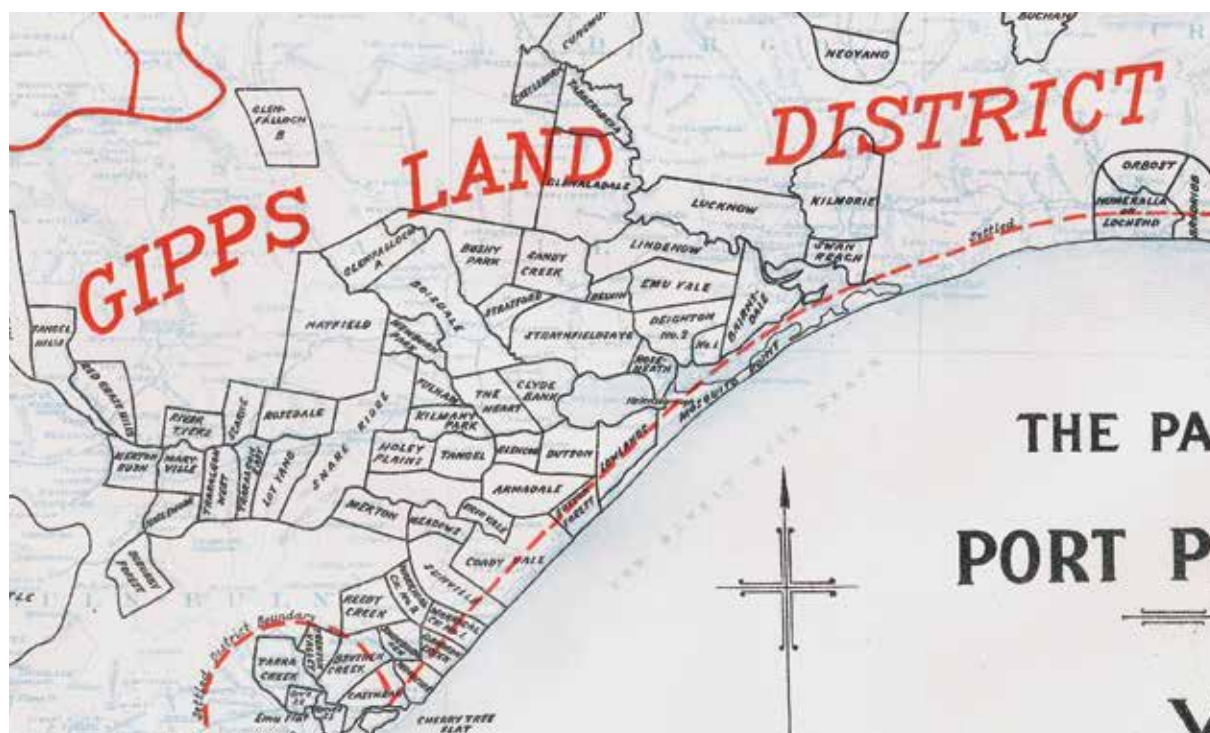


Squatting in the remote district of Port Phillip, as Victoria was formerly known, became legal in 1836 when the colonial authorities in Sydney realised that there was no hope of keeping the land-hungry pastoralists at bay. The inherent difficulties of the Gippsland terrain, with its dense vegetation, vast swamps, difficult river crossings, and high mountainous barrier to the north, made it one of the last regions in Victoria to be occupied under pastoral lease. It was not until 1840 that squatters began to arrive in the Latrobe Valley to take up runs, bringing with them cattle and stockmen. They mostly arrived via Port Albert or the Monaro, but some also trekked across the Great Dividing Range from Mansfield. In 1841, not long after McMillan took up land in Gippsland, a group of squatters formed a short-lived syndicate called the Gipps Land Company and arrived via Port Albert.

Access to a reliable water supply was critical to a successful run and many of the new arrivals pegged out their runs on land adjoining the Latrobe River. In 1844 Edward Hobson, on behalf of his brother Edmund, staked a claim of 19,000 acres to the high ground near the junction of the Traralgon Creek and the Latrobe River, away from the rushes and scrubby banks, but where there was also a reliable waterhole. The vast Merton Rush pastoral run extended almost from Moe to

Morwell<sup>51</sup>. Squatters were required to pay an annual licence fee, which gave them the right to graze stock but also determined the size of the run. The size of each pastoral leasehold or 'run' relied on the number of sheep or cattle a squatter had, or proposed to have, with the premise being that the land was to be used effectively. In 1848 squatters had the option of claiming the homestead block as a 'pre-emptive right', which was the right to freehold title to one square mile (or 640 acres) of land. By 1851, huge parcels of land across the Latrobe Valley had been taken up.

Unlike parishes, for which surveyors endeavoured to use Aboriginal names wherever possible, the squatting runs in the Latrobe Valley were mostly given non-Indigenous names. These include 'Red Grass Hills', 'Merton Rush', 'River Tyers', 'Maryville', 'Haselwood' (later spelt 'Hazelwood'), 'Scrubby Forest', 'Scarne', 'Rosedale', 'Snakes Ridge', 'Hill End', 'Merton' and 'Wilderness'. Aboriginal names were given to two pastoral runs, 'Traralgon' and 'Loy Yang', and both these words refer in Gunaikurnai language to the fish in the Latrobe River. Imposing new English names on the country of the Gunaikurnai, and indeed the appropriation of existing Aboriginal names, was a function of colonisation that went hand-in-hand with dispossessing Aboriginal people of their land.



Map showing a cluster of pastoral leaseholds that bordered the Latrobe River in the 1840s. This is part of a larger map of Port Phillip pastoral holdings produced by A.S. Kenyon in 1932 (source: Map Collection, State Library Victoria)

51 I.T. Maddern 1965, 'The Squatters in Gippsland', VHM, vol. 36, no. 141, August 1965, pp. 97–109.

## Frontier conflict

At the time of settlement, Gippsland Aboriginal people called themselves Gunai (Ganai) or Kurnai (meaning 'men'), from which the present-day amalgamated name 'Gunaikurnai' derives. Settlers most often referred to them as the 'Gippsland blacks' and sometimes referred to them as 'Warragul's' (or 'Warrigals'), a derogatory term that referred to dingoes or 'wild dogs'<sup>52</sup>. The Boon Wurrung to the west referred to the Gunaikurnai as the 'Twofold Bay blacks'<sup>53</sup>.

The arrival of McMillan in Gippsland heralded the beginning of a pastoral invasion that was catastrophic for the Gunaikurnai. Conflict between the Gunaikurnai and the newcomers over land and water defined the first few decades of British settlement in Gippsland. Whilst regular contact between the Gunaikurnai and settlers began relatively late in Gippsland (from 1840), sealing and whaling operations had been established at Westernport and along the southern coastline from at least the 1820s, which suggests that there would have been contact with the Gunaikurnai clans that occupied the Latrobe Valley. A seal-skin hat found amongst a motley collection of European objects at an abandoned Aboriginal camp in Gippsland in 1841 suggests there had been some contact — direct or indirect — between the Gunaikurnai and sealers<sup>54</sup>. It is known that sealers on Victoria's southern coast abducted Boon Wurrung women in the 1820s and 1830s<sup>55</sup>, and it would follow that they would have also on occasion taken Gunaikurnai women. Encounters between Gunaikurnai and absconded convicts from the Corinella settlement at Westernport in the 1820s were also likely during this period. It is also possible that an escaped convict may have lived amicably with a clan, or been given an Aboriginal wife, as was the experience of William Buckley in the coastal country west of Melbourne.

The disruption to traditional Aboriginal life caused by British colonialism after 1840 was particularly brutal in Gippsland. This owed partly to the isolated nature of much of the terrain, which enabled atrocities to go unreported. It also discouraged and prevented authorities from investigating alleged attacks by settlers on Aboriginal people when they were reported.

Gippsland was one of the last frontiers of pastoralism in Victoria (then part of NSW), and hence there was quite likely an added urgency felt by some settlers that this was their last chance to secure a pastoral run that was unimpeded and could be taken up without the risk of high stock losses. The violence perpetrated on the Gunaikurnai was also possibly exacerbated by the rugged and difficult terrain. The less accessible the country and the less amenable it was to grazing meant that it was possible for Aboriginal people, for a period at least, to remain on their country. Encounters between the Gunaikurnai and the invaders occurred in a mood of great fear (generated from stories of attacks on both sides) and probably heightened desperation on both sides.

The Port Phillip Aboriginal Protectorate, established by the colonial government, operated from 1838 to 1849. Headed by the 'Chief Protector', George Augustus Robinson, its purpose was to protect Aboriginal people in Victoria from mistreatment by settlers. It did this by establishing designated reserves and by appointing assistant protectors in four pastoral districts who distributed rations and were responsible for protecting the interests of Aboriginal people, and reporting regularly on their whereabouts, state of health and vital statistics. Robinson ventured into Gippsland only once — in mid-1844 — but this was intended more as an exploratory expedition for the government. This trip became dangerous, owing to the difficult terrain, and became more of a test of survival for the members of the party than a serious attempt to assist and protect the Gunaikurnai<sup>56</sup>. Assistant Protector William Thomas, who moved between the Yarra Mission in Melbourne, the Narre Warren Native Police reserve, and a number of Aboriginal encampments, had jurisdiction over the Kulin tribes of Melbourne and its wider environs, and had some limited dealings with the Gunaikurnai. He too only ventured into Gippsland once during his long period of office, and that was not until 1860<sup>57</sup>. Overall, the Protectorate proved a dismal failure, and this failure was particularly pronounced in Gippsland. There was no reservation set aside for Aboriginal use in the

52 For example, 'Tanjil' 1886, p. 20 and *Gippsland Mercury*, 6 October 1914, p. 4. The term 'warrigal' or 'warragul' is an Aboriginal word originating in NSW, meaning 'wild dog'.

53 Marie Hansen Fels 2011, *I Succeeded Once: The Aboriginal Protectorate on the Mornington Peninsula, 1839–1840*, ANU E Press and Aboriginal History Incorporated, Canberra, p. 87.

54 Henry Reynolds 1981, *The Other Side of the Frontier*, Penguin Books, Ringwood, p. 49.

55 Broome 2005, pp. 5–6.

56 Ian D. Clark (ed.) 2000, *The Journals of George Augustus Robinson*, vol. 4, Heritage Matters, Ballarat.

57 Patrick Morgan 1997, *The Settling of Gippsland: A regional history*, Gippsland Municipalities Association, Leongatha, p. 58.

1840s and 1850s, nor was there adequate surveillance of settlers' treatment of Aboriginal people. Critically, there was also no assistant protector assigned to the Gippsland district. There was no government representative of any kind in Gippsland until 1844, which meant that attacks on Aborigines often went unreported. As George Henry Haydon remarked in 1846, Robinson's efforts to provide assistance and protection to the Aboriginal people of Gippsland 'amounted to little or nothing'<sup>58</sup>. The distance from Melbourne and its relative isolation due to the lack of a passable road, the sparseness of white settlement and the absence of sizeable towns, conspired instead to protect some settlers from being accused of attacking and killing Aboriginal people.

Whilst there were many instances of functional co-existence of Aboriginal people and pastoral settlers in Victoria, including in Gippsland<sup>59</sup>, there is not a great deal of documentary evidence to suggest that this was common in the Latrobe Valley. (This is further discussed in Chapter 2). The initial contact period in Gippsland was devastating for the Gunaikurnai, and Aboriginal-settler relations, founded on fundamental inequity, were often hostile. Claims that the Gunaikurnai had suffered intolerably at the hands of the settlers appear frequently in the colonial records<sup>60</sup>. References to attacks on and killing on Aboriginal people by settlers, whether hinted at or overt, formed a common element in settler narratives, and so too did accounts of Aboriginal attacks on settlers<sup>61</sup>.

In exercising their cultural obligations to defend their Country, the Gunaikurnai had a reputation as bold warriors and for being 'warlike'. Strzelecki had employed the Aboriginal guide (from NSW), Charley Tarra, to lead his exploratory party from the Monaro and through to Omeo in 1840, but

was forced to turn back after an unfriendly encounter with the Gunaikurnai<sup>62</sup>. It was Howitt's understanding that the Kurnai were traditional enemies of the Kulin tribes<sup>63</sup>. The Wurundjeri referred to the Gunaikurnai as 'wild blacks', and made trips into Gippsland to carry out raids<sup>64</sup>. Assistant Protector William Thomas recorded that the Gunaikurnai had been involved in serious battles with the Boon Wurrung, also known as the 'Westernport tribe', in the years immediately preceding the establishment of the Port Phillip District, and that a large number of Gunaikurnai had been killed as a result<sup>65</sup>. Thomas reported that some of the group under his protection (mostly Boon Wurrung) went into Gippsland in the 1840s, pretending to hunt for the highly prized bullen bullen (lyrebird) tails, but in fact going there with the intention of fighting with the Gunaikurnai. Robinson concurred that the Gippsland tribe were traditional enemies of the Westernport (Boon Wurrung) tribe<sup>66</sup>. Nevertheless, mutual hostilities were also sometimes set aside, and inter-tribal gatherings were held between the Wurundjeri and the Gunaikurnai in the 1840s. There was considerable movement of Aboriginal clans and individuals in and out of Melbourne in the 1840s, and there were often reports of the 'Gippsland blacks' visiting Melbourne<sup>67</sup>.

The settler population expressed a high degree of fear towards the Gunaikurnai and carried the conviction that they were 'barbaric', 'treacherous' and 'savage'. This view was heightened during the hysteria-driven campaign to rescue the allegedly lost 'white woman' of Gippsland in the 1840s, when a large number of Aboriginal people in Gippsland were killed by whites in their desperate pursuit of the elusive 'white woman' and her supposed Aboriginal captor<sup>68</sup>.

58 Henry George Haydon 1846, *Five Years' Experience in Australia Felix*, Hamilton, Adams & Co., London, p. 158.

59 The example here is the McLeod brothers of East Gippsland, who are discussed in Thomas McCombie 1858, *The History of the Colony of Victoria*, Sands & Kenny, Melbourne; see also Bain Attwood 1987, 'Tarra Bobby: A Brataualung Man', *Aboriginal History*, vol. 11, nos. 1–2, pp. 41–57.

60 For example, F.J. Meyrick 1939, *Life in the Bush (1840–1847): A memoir of Henry Howard Meyrick*, Thomas Nelson, London; W.A. Brodribb 1976, *Recollections of an Australian Squatter*, London (first published 1883); McCombie 1858, pp. 84–96.

61 For example, Peter Gardner 2015, 'Some Random Notes on the Massacres 2000–2015'; Don Watson 1984, *Caledonia Australis: Scottish highlanders on the frontier of Australia*, Collins, Sydney; Michael Cannon 1991, *Who Killed the Koories?*, William Heinemann, Port Melbourne (see chapter 15: 'Terror Comes to Gippsland').

62 George Arden 1840, *Latest Information with Regard to Port Phillip*, [Port Phillip] Gazette Office, [Melbourne].

63 Howitt 1904, p. 80.

64 Arden 1840, p. 95.

65 Stephens 2014.

66 Fels 2011, p. 53, 63.

67 Cannon 1991, p. 166. William Thomas also makes frequent mention of 'Gippsland blacks' being in Melbourne in the 1840s (see Stephens 2014, vols 2 and 3).

68 See Julie Carr 2001, *The Captive White Woman of Gippsland: In pursuit of the legend*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton.

The traditional way of life of the Gunaikurnai was in fundamental conflict with the settlers' use of the land for grazing. Scotsman Angus McMillan wrote in his journal that in October 1840 he and Dr Arbuckle

*were attacked by about 80 natives. Arbuckle and I only had arms, and we wheeled our horses round to meet them. When they were distant about 60 yards they commenced throwing their spears. I fired both barrels, but did not kill any of them. They told me afterwards that they thought the report came from the horse's nostrils*<sup>69</sup>.

However, in the same journal McMillan also wrote of times when 'as soon as they saw us on horseback they took to their heels and ran away ... leaving their spears and rugs behind, which we left undisturbed', or another occasion when on 'seeing us, they set fire to their camp, and took into the scrub'<sup>70</sup>. In 1843 McMillan helped to form the notorious 'Highland Brigade' specifically to deal with Aboriginal reprisals, for killing the settlers' stock or stealing their property. McMillan's role in frontier violence is recorded in other nineteenth-century accounts and in the 1980s was the subject of historical scholarship by Peter Gardner and Don Watson, both of whom re-assessed McMillan, once celebrated as the discoverer and 'founding father' of Gippsland, as a murderer<sup>71</sup>. The Native Police also went into Gippsland in the 1840s to apprehend Aboriginal people; a number of Native Police were Boon Wurrung men, but only a few were Gunaikurnai men.

Most settlers in Gippsland believed that the Aborigines should be removed from their country to make way for a more profitable and 'productive' use of the land, and that their demise was inevitable. One squatter who was in search of

pastoral land in the district had no qualms about staying overnight in a 'mia mia' in the 1840s, possibly unafraid of a reprisal because settlers had already pushed the Aboriginal population out of the area<sup>72</sup>. Settlers' preferred means of removing the Aboriginal population were thinly masked in settlers' letters and diaries. One Gippsland settler wrote of the need for 'extermination'<sup>73</sup>. In a letter home to his family in England, Gippsland squatter Henry Meyrick wrote candidly of the hostilities:

*No wild beast of the forest was ever hunted down with such unsparing perseverance as they are. Men, women and children are shot whenever they can be met with ... these things are kept very secret ... some things I have said that [sic.] would form a dark a page as ever you read in a book of history*<sup>74</sup>.

The isolation and difficult nature of the country no doubt allowed for a greater degree of clandestine operations on the Gippsland frontier in the 1840s and 1850s. The Gunaikurnai fought the invaders with stealth and physical force, and suffered a large number of deaths. A small number of settlers were also killed. The exact number of Aboriginal people killed, and the circumstances of their deaths, is not known. Robinson estimated that the Aboriginal population in Gippsland had been five or six hundred in 1840<sup>75</sup>, depleted from a population estimated to have been around 1000 at the time of colonisation. By 1863, the local protector, Moravian missionary Frederick Hagenauer, recorded that there were only 51 Aboriginal men, women and children remaining from the locality defined as 'Latrobe and Rosedale'<sup>76</sup>. Peter Gardner revised the population estimate at the time of contact to be around 2600, while a more recent approximation is 4000 people<sup>77</sup>.

69 Angus McMillan, Diary, cited in Mackay 1916, Appendix, pp. 80, 82.

70 McMillan, excerpt from his diaries in Mackay 1916, Appendix, pp. 80, 82.

71 George Dunderdale 1898, *The Book of the Bush*; Peter Gardner – various; Watson 1984.

72 Charles Daley 1927, 'How the Hunters Came to Gippsland', VHM, 1927, vol. 6, no. 3, p. 163.

73 Henry Reynolds 2001, *An Indelible Stain?*, Penguin Books, Ringwood, p. 93.

74 F.J. Meyrick 1939, *Life in the Bush 1830–1870*.

75 Arden 1840, p. 97.

76 Board for the Protection of Aborigines 1863, *Annual Report*, p. 43, cited in Brough Smyth 1878, vol. I, p. 43.

77 RFA Gippsland report 2000. Goulding 2015, p. 5.



## Mountain riches

Given that much of the Latrobe Valley lies in gold-bearing country, there were great hopes that payable gold might be found in the district. Gold was found in small quantities in the Latrobe River; and in the Sandy Creek, east of Moe. The Haunted Hills area was also auriferous<sup>78</sup>. Small quantities of gold had been found at Morwell in the 1850s, at Moe in 1861, and in the Morwell River in 1874<sup>79</sup>, but more substantial mines were found to the north of the Valley and in the Baw Baw Ranges.

The discovery of gold in the remote mining fields in north Gippsland in the late 1850s and early 1860s drew eager prospectors into the dense forests — to the Russells Creek–Baw Baw Diggings in 1859, and to Walhalla in 1862. Diggers from the goldfields of central Victoria trekked hopefully to Gippsland, eager to find a lucrative mining opportunity. Walhalla, located in a steep valley high in the Baw Baw Ranges, was for a period one of the richest gold mines in Australia. It was first known as Stringer's Creek, named after Ned Stringer who discovered gold there in 1862. Toongabbie was important to these goldfields as the last stopping place for food and supplies before tackling the steep climb through dense forest to Walhalla.

Extracting minerals from the ground was another way in which the land was exploited and transformed. A complex network of clearings had to be made through the very steep and difficult terrain to enable access to the northern Tanjil and Walhalla goldfields before the work of mining could even begin<sup>80</sup>. When the potential riches of Walhalla were realised, opportunistic miners cleared the surrounding forest to make it more accessible. By 1870, Cobb & Co. had established a coach line along the sometimes precarious road from 'Rosedale to Toongabbie, Mountain Queen Hotel, Happy-go-Lucky and Royal Exchange Hotel, Stringer's Creek'; this operated every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday and returned on alternate days<sup>81</sup>. In 1910, after much lobbying and four years of construction, a narrow-gauge railway between Moe and Walhalla was completed, which greatly improved access.

Other minerals were also found in the district in the latter part of the nineteenth century, including copper near Traralgon in the 1870s, tin, silver and black marble<sup>82</sup>.

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78 Whitworth 1870, *Bailliere's Gazetteer*, pp. 178, 218, 332, 385. The Sandy Creek east of Moe was the scene of the Merton Rush (Whitworth 1870, p. 332).

79 For gold found at Moe, see Chris Johnston 1991, *Latrobe Valley Heritage Study*, Latrobe Regional Commission, Traralgon, p. 15.

80 Johnston 1991, pp. 15–17.

81 *Gippsland Times*, 8 February 1870, p. 1.

82 Alexander Sutherland (ed.) 1888, *Victoria and its Metropolis*, vol. 2, McCarron, Bird & Cameron, Melbourne, p. 358. Black marble is discussed in McKay 1916.

## A 'new province'

In the 1860s, new Victorian legislation, collectively known as the selection acts, sought to remove the squatters' stranglehold on the land and to open up the land to small farmers by allowing occupation before purchase<sup>83</sup>. This was a major reform to Victoria's land policy. From 1858, after years of growing opposition to the squatters' hold on the land, there began a concerted legislative effort to introduce land selection that would enable the land to be developed for agriculture, following the English model of the 'yeoman farmer'. The first of these measures, the *Nicholson Act (1858)* and the *Duffy Act (1861)*, were both failures for the small farmer. Wealthy pastoralists, especially those occupying the more desirable grazing districts, found convenient loopholes in the selection process that enabled them to purchase the land themselves and, as Tony Dingle points out, they were able to force 'genuine selectors onto the more distant northern plains and into the less hospitable Wimmera and Gippsland'<sup>84</sup>. The subsequent, more successful, *Land Act (Vic) 1869* was the means by which extensive land selection was carried out in Gippsland. In 1872 Sir Charles Gavan Duffy, chief architect of the land new reforms, legislative

member for North Gippsland during the 1860s, and Premier of Victoria in 1871, predicted that once the railway had been extended to Sale, Gippsland would become Victoria's 'new province'<sup>85</sup>.

Small-scale farming transformed the land and underpinned enormous social change. Hundreds of selectors took up blocks in the Latrobe Valley, mostly in the 1870s<sup>86</sup>. Even in Gippsland, thought to be an almost 'impenetrable' place of 'mountain ranges of savage grandeur ... down which raged great rivers in an eternal state of flood', selection happened quickly<sup>87</sup>. By 1878, Gippsland was described as a place of 'fair valleys, extensive plains, and stretches of park-like lands, whereon the grass is always green. There are large areas of soil of amazing fertility, but all that is now available for selection is heavily timbered'<sup>88</sup>. Writing about the Traralgon area, one journalist reminisced in the 1880s that only twenty years earlier there had been only a handful of settlers where now there are thousands<sup>89</sup>. The novelist Henry Kinsley's prediction thirty years earlier had been proven correct: that Gippsland would become 'the garden of Australia'<sup>90</sup>.



Selector's block surrounded by the ringbarked trees of a former forest (source: Goulding 2015, *A walk through Gippsland history*)

83 Tony Dingle 1984, *Settling*, Fairfax, Syme & Weldon, McMahon's Point (NSW), pp. 61–63.

84 Dingle 1984, p. 61.

85 *Gippsland Times*, 10 February 1872, p. 2; 13 February 1872, p. 2; referred to in 'The New Province', *Hamilton Spectator*, 1 June 1878, p. 1.

86 Charles Fahey 2015, 'If the Worst Comes to the Worst You Can Always Milk Cows', in Erik Eklund and Julie Fenley (eds) 2015, *Earth and Industry: Stories from Gippsland*, Monash University Publishing, Clayton, p. 166.

87 'Oshea' 1878, 'The New Province', *Hamilton Spectator*, 1 June 1878, p. 1.

88 'Oshea' 1878, 'The New Province'.

89 *Gippsland Farmers' Journal*, 6 December 1889, p. 1.

90 J.F. Hogan 1886, *The Irish in Australia*, George Robinson, Melbourne, p. 126.



*The village settlement on the Moe Swamp, intended for cropping, was laid out in the 1890s in long strip fields for ease of ploughing (source: National Library of Australia)*

Selectors mostly came from British, Scottish or Irish backgrounds, but not exclusively. There were German and Swiss selectors, and at least one Chinese selector, J.H. Jacgung, who took up a block in the parish of Jeeralang in the early 1900s<sup>91</sup>. Whilst selectors were overwhelmingly male, women were not prohibited from selecting land under the new legislation. The economic contribution made by women, who assisted with land-clearing, dairying and general labour, was vital to the success of the selection.

There were set rules for land selection: blocks were to be 320 acres; only one block could be selected per year; and selectors were required to occupy the land and 'improve' it. Selectors were required to fence the land and erect a dwelling within a designated period of time. As well as complying with the rules of selection, aspiring settlers had to endure the back-breaking, muscle-burning and months-long task of improving their block by clearing the dense scrub, cutting the tree ferns and felling the trees, which included Blue Gum, Mountain Ash, Stringybark,

Messmate, Blackwood, Blackbutt, Peppermint Gum and River Red Gum. Trees were felled and grubbed (their stumps removed), which was slow, dangerous, arduous work. Burning was also sometimes resorted to, but with little effect. The practice of ring-barking was carried out extensively. A typical selector's farm in Gippsland often shows the modest timber home set against cleared bush and often with the eerie backdrop of tall and ghostly ringbarked trees. While waiting to build a house, some settlers retained a giant hollow tree for shelter.

The archetypal story of the selector, doing it tough on a forested block in the Gippsland bush was not far removed from the reality of life for many selectors in the Latrobe Valley. A lot could go wrong. Settlers' stories tell of the harshness and challenges of life on a selection, especially the hard physical toil, the innumerable dangers and challenges, family tragedies, and often stark isolation<sup>92</sup>.

<sup>91</sup> See *Gippsland Heritage Journal*, no. 5, 1988. J.H. Jacgung took up just over 319 acres in the Parish of Jeeralang on 16 April 1903 (Parish of Jeeralang parish plan, PROV).

<sup>92</sup> See South Gippsland Pioneers' Association, 1966.

The Victorian Government promoted various forms of closer settlement in the 1890s and early 1900s as a means of encouraging more people to take up farming pursuits. One was the village settlement scheme, which was established in the early 1890s, following the Melbourne bank crash with its ensuing economic depression and high unemployment. This scheme encouraged unemployed city folk to learn farming and take up a small block. Areas of fertile hill country were typically selected for these settlements, which were established at Narracan, Yarragon and Moondarra<sup>93</sup>. The largest village settlement in the Latrobe Valley was established in 1895 on the Moe Swamp, which was an area the government had reclaimed through extensive drainage works. By 1902, there were 34 settlers across an area of 912 acres, with many growing potatoes. The total population of 233 included 155 children<sup>94</sup>. Charles Fahey points out that in promoting this scheme the government's *Journal of Agriculture* (Victoria) highlighted the success story of Mr Swinger, who ran a small dairy farm on the Moe Swamp, but his relative prosperity was the exception rather than the rule<sup>95</sup>.

Another form of closer settlement was the soldier settlement scheme, which was introduced following the Great War and later widened to include returned soldiers from the Second World War. In the Latrobe Valley the only significant

soldier settlement estate established after World War I was the Hazelwood Estate, established in 1922<sup>96</sup>. Individual ex-servicemen were also eligible to select land under the scheme. One applicant was a returned ex-servicewoman, nurse Annie Maynard Smith, who took up a soldier settlement block at Thorpdale, south of Moe, in 1920. She is a rare example of a woman who successfully obtained a block under the soldier settlement scheme in Victoria. Although assisted by her sons, she struggled to manage the farm as a single mother, and ultimately gave up farming in 1926<sup>97</sup>.

After World War II, a number of large estates in the region were compulsorily acquired by the government for the purpose of soldier settlement. These were largely concentrated at Mirboo North and Traralgon, and included the following estates:

Estate	Locality
Humphrey's	Boolarra
Carey's	Glengarry
Herbertson's	Morwell
Groube's, Lawton's, Mayall's, Silvan Hill, Thwaites'	Mirboo North
Hill's	Glengarry–Traralgon
Pratt's, The Park	Traralgon <sup>98</sup>

93 Johnston 1991, p. 8.

94 *Age*, 9 September 1902, p. 6.

95 Fahey 2015, in Eklund and Fenley, pp. 173–74; Johnston 1991, pp. 7–8; Goulding 2015.

96 Morwell Historical Society Inc. 1990, *Glimpses of Our Past: Early Morwell and District*, Morwell Historical Society Inc., Morwell.

97 Graham Goulding, pers. com., February 2019.

98 Smallwood 1992, pp. 242–47.



## Responses to the landscape

For early settlers the landscape of the Latrobe Valley was one of drama and extremes. The new country was both feared and embraced. The virtually impenetrable forest on the western edge of the Valley created a barrier that turned people away but also enticed. Explorers and early settlers pushed their way through the dense, tangled vegetation on foot, wielding tomahawks to cut a path.

The Latrobe Valley and the wider Gippsland district was regarded in the nineteenth century as a place of danger and personal risk, and of fear and foreboding. Many who came to the Valley or simply passed through it shared this view. Whilst Gippsland was often envisaged as an arcadia and a promised land, for many the reality was very different. While many selectors were successful, a great many faced hardships and abandoned their farms. There were seemingly endless dangers and challenges to be overcome, not the least of which was access. The innumerable dangers and impediments included dingoes, snakes and the sheep-killing 'Morwell lion'<sup>99</sup>. The area of the 'Haunted Hills' near Moe, so-named because it was reputed to have caused a scare to cattle, suggests a fear and uneasiness about this landscape<sup>100</sup>. The region's isolation and remoteness was more often viewed through a prism of fear rather than one of romanticism.

Whilst settlers' responses to landscape of the Latrobe Valley were varied, they tended to be shaped by personal experiences and associations. The valley proper was pleasant country of open plains, and well-watered with numerous streams, presenting a welcome pastoral scene. North and south of the Valley was heavily timbered hill country set against a backdrop of majestic mountains that drew similarities with the romantic and picturesque landscapes of the Old World. Here the air was pure and salubrious<sup>101</sup>. Visitors marvelled at the tall trees and giant tree ferns. Colonial artists

considered the scenery worthy of painting and the distant Mount Baw Baw was considered sublime<sup>102</sup>. The wildflowers presented a delicate beauty and some imagined the landscape was a delightful secret world. Hidden in the dense forest and tangled undergrowth, there was a sense of enclosure.

Settlers in the Latrobe Valley also appreciated the beauty of the bush, despite struggling against the natural environment on many fronts. Settlers enjoyed picnics in the bush and fishing in the rivers and creeks. From the 1890s to the 1920s, farmer and amateur photographer Bert Boardman captured the beauty of the forest around Jeeralang and Morwell, with its tea tree and fern glens<sup>103</sup>. Another who delighted in the natural environment around her was the self-taught botanist, garden writer and wild flower expert Jean Galbraith of 'Dunedin' at Tyers. From the 1920s and through her long life, Galbraith shared her knowledge and her passion for the native flowers of the Latrobe Valley region. She propagated native wildflowers and wrote about her observations of the bush she knew so well<sup>104</sup>.

Land clearing for farming, mining and road construction in the twentieth century destroyed much of the natural bushland and dense forests, but the scene of a settled countryside with its patchwork of productive dairy farms, was also admired and savoured. Despite all the hard work of land-clearing and dramatic transformation of the region — or, conversely, because of it — the Valley retained an atmosphere of peacefulness. Writing to the *Weekly Times* newspaper in 1950, one woman shared her impressions of the pleasing view from her dairy farm:

*The view ... is lovely. We are really near to the bright blue sky and we get lost in the morning mist. Then the sun comes out to show glistening trees and far-away homes. Though we are only twelve miles from Traralgon we are at world's end here*<sup>105</sup>.

99 See for example, *Trafalgar and Yarragon Times*, 15 October 1915, p. 7.

100 James Smith (ed.) 1905, *Cyclopedia of Victoria*, vol. 3, p. 552.

101 See for example, Whitworth 1870 (in reference to Moe), p. 258.

102 Patrick Morgan 1986, *The Literature of Gippsland*, Centre for Gippsland Studies, Gippsland Institute of Advanced Education, Churchill, p. 11.

103 See Bert Boardman collection, State Library Victoria Pictures Collection.

104 Meredith Fletcher 2014, Jean Galbraith: Writer in a valley, Monash University Publishing, Clayton.

105 'Dear Miranda', *Weekly Times*, 5 July 1950, p. 47.



*Daniel Rutter Long, watercolour sketch of the Latrobe River, 1883, from his 'Collection of Views of Gippsland' (source: State Library Victoria, Accession No. H2003.91/49)*

## Access to the Valley

The landscape of the Latrobe Valley posed a number of dangers and challenges, and the first was the fundamental difficulty of its physical location, hemmed in by rugged mountains to the north and by dense forest and a large swamp on the west. The problem of isolation needed to be overcome.

The coastal outpost of Port Albert played an important role in the 1840s and 1850s as a critical access point to the Latrobe Valley, supplying the squatters until a viable land route from Melbourne was established. Rosedale also played an important role in the history of settlement in the Valley before the advent of the railway. It marked a junction from Port Albert to the gold mines and through the pastoral district.

Movement through the Valley and settlement patterns were determined by rough tracks and roads, and later by railways, but patterns of settlement also determined the layout of new roads. Before the railway between Sale and Melbourne was completed in 1879, road travel via the coach road from Melbourne, via Drouin and Warragul, was unreliable. Some took McDonald's Track, blazed by G.T. McDonald in 1862, which followed a route south of the main coach road,

from Lang Lang to Morwell<sup>106</sup>. The most reliable access was overland from Port Albert, which was accessed via coastal steamer.

Through the 1870s the small towns and settlements remained relatively isolated and undeveloped. Prior to the railway being completed in 1879, people and goods, including produce and timber, were transported by packhorses and drays, which travelled slowly across rough, poorly made roads. The main coach road from Melbourne, the Gipp's Land Road, had been built by the 1860s but was difficult to traverse in parts. A timber bridge half a mile long was constructed over the extensive Moe Swamp in the 1870s<sup>107</sup>. In the early 1870s, the visiting British novelist Anthony Trollope described a hair-raising experience travelling by Cobb & Co. coach to Sale through what he described as the notorious 'glue pot' on 'the Mouey' (Moe) with the horses 'up to their chests in mud'<sup>108</sup>. The gazetteer of the time discouraged visitors from Melbourne from taking the coach road through the fern gullies to Traralgon, and advised that the most reliable route was 'via Port Albert and steamer to Melbourne'<sup>109</sup>.

As the population increased, the need for improved transport became critical. Victorian Railways completed a rail line between Oakleigh, on the outskirts of Melbourne, and Sale in 1878. The new line was constructed in separate stages: the section from Sale to Morwell, with stations at Rosedale and Traralgon, was completed in June 1877; the section from Oakleigh to Bunyip in October 1877; the section from Moe to Morwell in December 1877; and the section from Moe to Bunyip in March 1878. In 1879, new track was laid between Oakleigh and the existing suburban rail line, thus connecting the Gippsland line with Melbourne. The completed line to Melbourne was opened on 2 April 1879<sup>110</sup>.

The development of the Melbourne to Sale railway, with its numerous offshoots into the hills, transformed the Latrobe Valley and redefined access from Melbourne. The completed railway provided improved linear connections between towns, and access to mines and mills, and to the city for employment. In addition, it enabled products to be transported to markets in Melbourne; it provided jobs for railway workers; and fostered the overall development of the Valley. The towns along its chosen route



*Struggling in the 'gluepot', 1874 (source: State Library Victoria, Accession No. IAN13/07/74/109d)*

106 I.T. Maddern 1979, *A Souvenir History of Morwell*; Ian F. McLaren 1957, 'The Ruhr of Australia', VHM, vol. 27, no. 4, p. 39, June 1957; South Gippsland Pioneers' Association 1966, pp. 101–02; Whitworth 1879, *Bailliere's Gazetteer*; p. 339; History of Lang Lang: <http://www.langlang.net/mcdonaldstrack.html>

107 Whitworth 1879, pp. 328–29.

108 Quoted in McLaren 1957, p. 40.

109 Whitworth 1870, p. 385.

110 Context Pty Ltd 2010, 'Latrobe City Heritage Study: Vol. 1', July 2010, p. 22; Goulding 2015.



*Log tramway in Gippsland, c.1880s (source: Smith 1980 Historical Sketch of Victoria)*

flourished. In 1903, Traralgon benefited further when the railway authorities decided to establish a goods depot at the Traralgon railway station rather than further east at Sale. The new railway line bypassed other existing towns, which declined as a result or disappeared altogether. Morwell Bridge was one of these, but Morwell proper was established on the railway line and has since developed into one of the Latrobe Valley's largest towns.

It was not just the major railway stations on this central line that influenced the development of towns in the Valley. Various branch lines sprung from the three main stations up into the hills or across the plains and allowed smaller settlements to grow. There was a branch line from Traralgon that went north to Glengarry, then towards Heyfield and Stratford in the east. Another branch line from Morwell headed south through Yinnar, Boolarra and on to Mirboo North. Moe had three branch lines: one line that headed north-east to Yallourn, another line that headed south

to Thorpdale; and a third that headed north to the Walhalla goldfields. The line to Yallourn was at first a branch line from Hernes Oak, which was constructed in 1922. This was replaced by a branch line from Moe in 1953.

It wasn't long before the narrow-gauge tramways used to haul cut timbers to the nearest roadway were extended to the main railway line and on to Melbourne. This network of main lines and branch lines made it possible for farmers to run dairy cattle instead of beef as it was now possible to safely transport milk and butter by rail to markets in Melbourne before it spoiled.

The railway dominated transport routes in and out of Gippsland from 1879 and through much of the twentieth century. The horse and cart remained a mainstay, with the local blacksmith's shop a ubiquitous presence in most town centres until the Second World War. Motor cars began to appear in the early 1900s, foreshadowing the need for improved roads. The Country Roads Board (CRB) was established in 1913 under the *Country Roads Board Act (Vic) 1912* to manage the construction and maintenance of roads in the state's country districts. Its first task was to investigate conditions across the State and to prioritise construction work in areas known to be difficult. These included Gippsland, Cape Otway and the north-east, where, the CRB determined, 'the early construction of better roads is a matter of vital importance to the welfare of the settlers'<sup>111</sup>. The Gippsland district, which included Traralgon and Yarram on the eastern border, was given first priority, with East Gippsland second<sup>112</sup>. It was not easy work. The CRB representatives traversed the entire region, often travelling miles on horseback or on foot to accommodate the hill and forest country. Their inspection was undertaken during winter, beginning in May at Lilydale, traveling east to Traralgon, then returning to Melbourne through the South Gippsland shires and along the coast. They arrived back in Melbourne in September but during these long, dark, wet winter months they observed, recorded and took photographs of hundreds of tracks and roads, and spoke to dozens of residents. Their main concern was with gradients and locations, which 'almost without exception ... [were] at fault'<sup>113</sup>. They put this down to the selection era of the 1870s and 1880s and the 'adoption of what may be termed the natural roads following the leading features, by which a track could be secured at the cost of a clearing only'<sup>114</sup>. An additional problem was that local municipalities had to purchase land, sometimes

111 Country Roads Board (CRB) 1914, *Annual Report*, pp. 9–10.

112 CRB 1914, *Annual Report*, pp. 9–10.

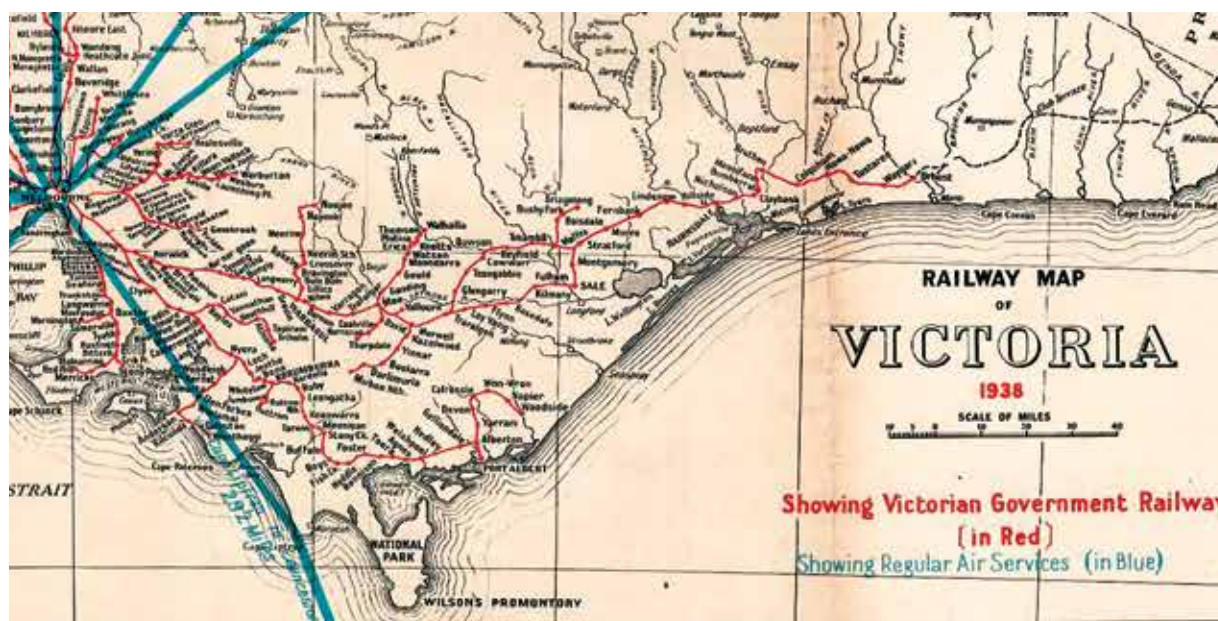
113 CRB 1914, p. 12.

114 CRB 1914, p. 12.



compulsorily, in order to carry out deviations — ‘and it is safe to affirm that there is scarcely a road in the whole of the hill country of Gippsland that has not been deviated in some part’ — but, given the difficulties of the task and the low level of rates paid by the residents, the decision was more often to make short-term improvements to existing roads. The CRB were concerned that settlers all through the hill country were ‘truly in an unenviable position ... many of them stated that although they had been in occupation for fifteen and twenty years, they had not yet had a wheeled vehicle on their holdings’<sup>115</sup>. They were also concerned about ‘retarding the growth of

country townships’. The first contract completed under the new Act was a section of the Main Gippsland Road in Warragul Shire<sup>116</sup>. Nonetheless, it took a long time to attend to all the roads through Gippsland, let alone the rest of the State. East of Warragul Shire, the Main Gippsland Road between Morwell and Traralgon was said to be ‘full of holes and ruts, and, after rain, is a “veritable death trap”... bogging and holding up for half a day over a dozen motors’<sup>117</sup>. By 1920, this road had been upgraded from Melbourne to Warragul and renamed the Princes Highway, and by 1925 the remainder of the road had also been upgraded<sup>118</sup>.



Detail from *Railways Map of Victoria, 1938*, showing the main railway line through the Latrobe Valley and the various branch lines. (Source: *Victorian Yearbook 1938*)

<sup>115</sup> CRB 1914, p. 15.

<sup>116</sup> CRB 1914, p. 71.

<sup>117</sup> David Langmore 2013, *Planning Power: The uses and abuses of power in the planning of the Latrobe Valley*, chapter 2.

<sup>118</sup> Langmore 2013, chapter 2; CRB 1921, *Annual Report*, p. 5.

## Fire and flood

The Latrobe Valley presented innumerable challenges for early settlers, of which fire and flood figured prominently. Fire and flood had shaped and reshaped the Valley for thousands of years, and in the nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first centuries it has continued to be prone to both.

Bushfire was a recurring threat in the summer months. Settlers would routinely be burnt out, properties damaged, stock lost, and lives lost. The extensive fires of Black Thursday in 1851 left their mark on the heavily forested country of Gippsland, where early settlers observed large areas of blackened trees in the years after 1851. Bushfires in the 1870s also devastated much of the forested country<sup>119</sup>. Severe bushfires also raged through the Latrobe Valley in February 1898, which devastated Morwell and Thorpdale, leaving 12 people dead. Many settlers were burnt out, including the entire village settlement at Thorpdale<sup>120</sup>. Old-timers at Traralgon, who had experienced the horrors of Black Thursday in 1851, claimed that the 1898 fires were even more severe and more frightening<sup>121</sup>. There were further fires in 1926 that caused damage in the area, but this was eclipsed by the enormity of Black Friday in 1939 which claimed many lives. In 1944, only five years later, catastrophic fires again

ravaged the Valley, which caused a number of deaths and the long-burning mine fire at the Yallourn open-cut<sup>122</sup>. This costly and life-threatening disaster drew the rebuke of Justice Hugh Stretton, who was the chief commission for the subsequent Royal Commission of 1944. He blamed the SEC and its planners for the unsuitable design of the town of Yallourn, which denied its occupants sufficient precautions in the event of fire<sup>123</sup>. He also went one step further, taking the opportunity to criticise the controlling manner in which the SEC administered Yallourn, allowing residents little agency in their lives<sup>124</sup>. Many people survived both those fires. Heather Rose of Jeeralang Hills, aged 15, told readers of the *Weekly Times* in 1951, 'already I have come through two big bushfires'<sup>125</sup>. In the extreme drought conditions of February 1983, a large fire broke out near Morwell and firefighters worked desperately to keep the fire from crossing into the Yallourn open-cut coal mine. A blaze in a brown coal mine was the SEC's 'constant dread'<sup>126</sup>. Not until Black Saturday, 7 February 2009, were there bushfires in Victoria of a similar magnitude as those of Black Friday in 1939. On that day in 2009, the devastating Churchill fire left 10 people dead and destroyed property and forest timber. A number of local memorials in the Latrobe Valley honour those whose lives were lost as a result of



*Hazelwood Cemetery memorial to 1944 bushfire victims, with the 13 names of those who died inscribed on the right pillar of the entrance gates (source: Elaine Andrijczak)*

119 McLaren 1957, p. 39.

120 South Gippsland Pioneers' Association 1966; *Herald*, 13 January 1898, p. 1; *Weekly Times*, 15 January 1898, p. 22.

121 *Argus*, 13 January 1898, p. 5.

122 Prue McGoldrick 1984, *Yallourn Was*, Gippsland Printers, Morwell, p. 121.

123 Robert Freestone 2010, *Urban Nation*, CSIRO Publishing, Collingwood, p. 122.

124 Tom Griffiths 2002, 'Judge Stretton's Fires of Conscience', *Gippsland Heritage Journal*, no. 26, September 2002, pp. 9–18.

125 *Weekly Times*, 28 February 1951, p. 44.

126 *Age*, 9 February 1983, p. 3.

bushfires, including a memorial on the entrance gates at the Hazelwood Cemetery that remembers the 13 people who died in the fires of 14 February 1944, which commenced in Yallourn.

Floods have also been a recurring event in the Latrobe Valley. With so many waterways fed by the high country, large volumes of water accumulated as they flowed eastwards; this was exacerbated by the slow-moving Latrobe River. The most catastrophic flood was in December 1934, which also affected the Yarra River in Melbourne. The Latrobe River burst its banks and completely flooded the open-cut mines at Yallourn and Morwell, causing operations to cease for several months and leaving a scene of devastation at Brown Coal Mine<sup>127</sup>. Moe and other towns on major waterways were also affected. Only a few years later, in 1937, there were serious

floods in the Valley, with parts of Moe under water<sup>128</sup>. In a letter to the Woman's Page of the *Weekly Times* in 1938, one correspondent wrote that there was 'great work now on the Latrobe River, dozens of men are at work cleaning out the bed of the river as a help against floods'. She recalled the last time (most likely a reference to 1934) when she watched a family being rescued after 'they had taken refuge in the ceiling of their house ... then the men in the boat went back out for another family taking refuge on their roof with their dogs'<sup>129</sup>. 'Bugle Lily' remembered 'flood time' (again, probably a reference to the great flood of 1934) when she was a young schoolgirl — 'many trips did I make in a boat supplied by the Shire Council to convey people to the town as water covered the main road now called the Princes Highway'<sup>130</sup>.



*Sawmill workers carried three victims of the 1939 Black Friday bushfires for 18 kilometres in order to reach medical help in Moe (source: Victorian Year Book 1984, opposite p. 320)*

127 John Adams 1978, *So Tall the Trees*, Narracan Shire Council, Traralgon, p. 173; *Victorian Year Book* 1984, p. 253.

128 *Age*, 19 October 1937, p. 14.

129 *Weekly Times*, 7 May 1938, p. 34.

130 *Weekly Times*, 17 May 1941, p. 25.



## Transforming the land

For thousands of years the Latrobe Valley had been subtly shaped by Aboriginal occupation and activity. The incursion of European settlers into the area led to more dramatic changes that took place over a relatively short period of time. The initial clearing of bush and tree-felling by early settlers had a relatively minor impact on the Valley's landscape until the 1860s when the land began to be cleared on a larger scale — firstly for land selection, and then for roads and railways. These initial clearings were made in response to local needs — where space was needed for gold-mining, farming and for ease of movement. In the late-nineteenth century, land also began to be cleared by timber-cutters and sawmill operators. The towering Mountain Ash were felled and used for railway sleepers, and in bridge-building and general construction. In the latter decades of the nineteenth century the new roads assisted and enabled further closer settlement, and especially encouraged the development of dairy farming. Roads facilitated increased timber-felling in the nearby forests, and mining interests.

Water resources were adapted for farming and urban settlement. Creeks and river were dammed, and swamps were drained. In the interests of claiming more land and making it more productive, efforts were made to drain the vast Moe Swamp, stretching for 12 miles between Moe and Yarragon and covering around 9000 acres of land. The swamp had been formed by the meeting of the Moe River and the Shady Creek, and their combined flows spreading out across a wide area 'to form what was practically a reed covered lake, bordered with ti-tree [sic.]'<sup>131</sup>. Draining the swamp was a major undertaking that was authorised by a special provision of the *Land Act (Vic) 1894*, which initiated the drainage of four other swamps across Victoria in a proactive strike for land reclamation at a time of economic difficulty in Victoria.

Draining the Moe Swamp commenced in 1888 and was thought completed until heavy rains in the winter of 1893 'proved beyond the shadow of a doubt that the provision made for carrying off the flood water was totally inadequate'<sup>132</sup>. Carlo Catani, the highly regarded chief engineer for roads and bridges in Victoria's Public Works Department, had been given the responsibility for enlarging the drain and ensuring the swamp

could be reclaimed. The works employed several hundred men and created a drain that was 11 miles long, between 15 and 43 feet wide, and seven feet deep. This allowed for 85,000 cubic feet of water to flow away from the swamp every minute. Added to this were 27 lateral drains that ran into the main drain. A local newspaper described the 'black peaty nature' of the soil and prophesied that 'when drained and consolidated the soil of the Moe Swamp is certain to prove most suitable for the growth of maize, flax, hops, potatoes, mangles and sugar beet'<sup>133</sup>. However, floods continued to hamper the success of the drainage works. There were further floods in 1895, 1900 and 1901 before sufficient funding was provided to ensure the works could be fully completed<sup>134</sup>.

By the early twentieth century, with more widespread and intensive settlement, the human impact on the landscape became more evident. The Latrobe Valley changed significantly. Settlers and timber-cutters systematically cleared large areas of forest and scrub, replaced by exotic grasses and trees, and stock trampled the ground. By the 1940s and 1950s, areas of the Valley had been dramatically transformed into busy and highly populated urban-industrial regions. Rivers, open plains and forests were adapted and utilised for industrial purposes, most dramatically for coal-mining and paper manufacture. Waterways were diverted, re-aligned, and polluted by industrial activity, including the Latrobe River. New water supply services were developed, including Lake Narracan and Blue Rock Dam, which met with some opposition from landowners. Vast open-cut coal mines sat alongside the imposing steel and concrete complexes topped with towering chimneys that burned brown coal to produce electricity. The sounds and the smells, as well as the sights of large-scale industry, were a radical departure from the pastoral scene of the early twentieth century.

Grazing has also significantly altered the environment of the Latrobe Valley. Geomorphologically, the Valley is a riparian zone, which is characterised by rich, low-lying soil alongside a river with surrounding hills suffering from erosion. The banks of waterways are also known to suffer the most damage from hard-hoofed animals once plants are eaten or

131 'The Moe Swamp: Magnificent land reclaimed: The work in progress', *Warragul Guardian and West Gippsland Advertiser*, 20 March 1894, p. 3.

132 'The Moe Swamp', *Warragul Guardian and West Gippsland Advertiser*, 20 March 1894, p. 3.

133 'The Moe Swamp', *Warragul Guardian and West Gippsland Advertiser*, 20 March 1894, p. 3.

134 Johnston 1991, p. 11.



trampled on and the deep, fertile soil becomes hard and compacted. This leads to reduced infiltration of water, more run-off, increased erosion, a higher sediment load, loss of ground cover, increased soil temperatures and greater evaporation. The low-lying Latrobe River only serves to make this process worse because it attracts animals that congregate to drink<sup>135</sup>. Extensive grazing and agriculture in the Valley over a long period of time is now understood to have nutritionally 'depleted' the soil due to 'compaction and erosion'<sup>136</sup>.

The beginning of large-scale coal-mining operations caused radical change to the environment and had myriad other impacts. The scene of ever-widening open-cut mines in the Valley was both exhilarating and alarming. Coal-fired power stations, briquette manufacture and timber milling all impacted enormously on the natural environment. APM drew heavily on the Latrobe River for its operations at Maryvale and also polluted the environment. A small but significant impact was the constant irritation of coal dust, especially for women who had to remove it from the washing hanging on the line<sup>137</sup>.

Some places, such as Walhalla or sawmill settlements, flourished as busy settlements before facing subsequent decline. Walking tracks and tramway tracks that were once so important for reaching remote gold-mining areas or heavily timbered forest are now overgrown or replaced, and the infamous 'gluepot' at Moe has long disappeared. Today the landscape is rich with evidence of human endeavour, including small towns and large cities, roads and bridges, farms and timber plantations, and the most visually dominant features: the power stations and briquette factories, pondage, and the cavernous open-cut coal mines. The human stories of endeavour, success and failure that are woven through the visible fabric of the past are integral to this complex and layered cultural landscape.

An appreciation of the natural environment, supported by nature enthusiasts, bushwalkers, tourism interests and the catchment authorities, has helped to preserve some of the Latrobe

Valley's natural beauty. The natural environment has long provided important recreational opportunities both to local people and visitors. In the nineteenth century it was the 'wild' country and the excellent fishing and shooting — regarded as 'unsurpassed in the colony' — that attracted tourists to Gippsland<sup>138</sup>. In the pastoral country around Moe, it was claimed that Latrobe River 'abounds in fine large fish'<sup>139</sup>. Robert Percy Whitworth advertised 'upcountry tours' to Gippsland in the 1870s, where he escorted gentlemen from Melbourne on fishing and shooting trips. As a measure to further advance the fishing opportunities of the Latrobe River, salmon was transported to the river's headwaters with some difficulty and released there in 1877<sup>140</sup>. Tourism in the Latrobe Valley developed further in the postwar period. Keith Winser's 1956 *Australian Road Atlas* listed a number of establishments in Moe, Morwell and Traralgon<sup>141</sup>. In Traralgon a highlight for the tourist was the 'beautiful Traralgon Creek with its fern gullies and glades' and the local beauty spots of Tarra Valley, Bulga and Yerrang Parks<sup>142</sup>. Morwell National Park, near Jeeralang, was set aside in 1966. A national park was also established at Moondarra. There were also the attractions of the alpine area, which drew bushwalkers in summer and skiers in winter. The extensive Alpine National Park, presiding at the north of the Valley, has also preserved much of the natural landscape. In each town and city in the Valley, local beauty spots and swimming holes are cherished by their local communities.

The dramatic transformation of the land and waterways through the twentieth century, largely a result of industrial activity, took place over a relatively short period of time. The Gunaikurnai consider that those responsible for these developments failed to care adequately for the land and that, as a result, the Country has become sick and needs to be healed. The Gunaikurnai believe that a healthy Country can be regained and that renewal is possible. Working towards this objective would empower the local Gunaikurnai community and would recover and rebuild some of the knowledge about the significance and uses of plants and landforms<sup>143</sup>.

135 <https://sites.google.com/site/geomorphologyandmammals/home/effects-of-hoofed-animals> (accessed 25 June 2018).

136 Australian Government 2018, Bioregional Assessments: Gippsland Basin, <http://www.bioregionalassessments.gov.au/assessments/gippsland-basin-bioregion>, accessed 30 May 2018.

137 Prue McGoldrick 1990, "'Coal dust and mud': Experiences of Yallourn women in the 1920s", *Gippsland Heritage Journal*, vol. 8, June 1990, p. 32.

138 *Handbook to Victoria*, 1880.

139 Whitworth 1870, p. 218.

140 *Gippsland Times*, 31 December 1877, p. 4.

141 Keith Winser 1956, *Australian Road Atlas*.

142 Keith Winser 1956, *Australian Road Atlas*, p. 114.

143 Gunaikurnai, Whole of country plan website.



*The road through the Gippsland hills in the 1950s (source: Under Southern Skies, [1955])*

## Hazelwood Pondage

Much of the natural landscape of the Latrobe Valley has been significantly altered in the pursuit of industrial development, especially in the postwar period. Rivers and creeks were diverted, the hills were denuded of trees, and air quality was often poor. Popular fishing and swimming spots on the Latrobe River became less appealing on account of considerable pollution and the overall less salubrious environs. The body of warm water alongside the chimneys of the Hazelwood Power Station, known as the Hazelwood Pondage, provided a contrasting situation — a new and inviting recreational opportunity created by industry.

The Hazelwood power station was completed in 1971 at a time of expansion and confidence on the part of the SEC. The SEC made the pondage available for public use as part of the wider social infrastructure that it provided for the community. For over forty years, this was a valued local facility where people enjoyed swimming, fishing,



boating and water-skiing. A yacht club was established along with a municipal caravan park for holiday-makers, which was set on the water's edge amidst an arboretum. The Latrobe Valley Sauna Sail was held annually on Queen's Birthday weekend until 2018. As well as encouraging recreation, the pondage became a habitat for aquatic plants and animals, including barramundi, attracting anglers from far and wide.

The private company ENGIE, which purchased Hazelwood Power Station in the 1990s, closed the pondage in 2019 citing concerns about the stability of the dam walls. There were also concerns about water pollution and dangerous algal blooms. While the power station closed in 2017, the pondage remained open until early 2019, with the caravan park closing shortly thereafter.

*Images: Above: Seaplane on Hazelwood Pondage, c.1970s (source: Museum Victoria); left: Water-skiing at Hazelwood Pondage in the 1970s (source: Victoria's Resources, 1975)*





# 02

## Chapter 2: Work and Industry

This chapter traces the development of work and industry in the Latrobe Valley from the late nineteenth century, following the rise and fall of different occupations and industrial enterprises. It examines the wide range of work that men and women were engaged in — from large-scale coal-fired power stations to small local industries and work in the home. The Latrobe Valley emerged as the source of the richest coal fields in Australia and one of the largest coal fields in the world. From the 1920s through the 1960s it was developed as the most industrialised regional area in Victoria, which enjoyed full employment, vocational education and other workplace benefits, but the decline of many key areas of work in the mid-1990s has impacted significantly on the local economy and on working lives. The Valley is now a region in transition and is working to identify economic strengths and opportunities.



## Introduction

Following the completion of the Melbourne–Sale railway in 1879, there were great ambitions for the productive potential of the Latrobe Valley. With new knowledge of its rich natural resources, many visitors and notable figures made predictions about the region's as yet untapped wealth. It was poised for greatness. In the late 1870s, Victorian Premier Charles Gavan Duffy declared Gippsland as 'the new province' and British novelist Charles Kingsley prophesied that Gippsland would become 'the brightest jewel in the British crown'<sup>1</sup>. The great potential of coal-mining in the Latrobe Valley, which began to be realised in 1919, raised hopes that it may become a second Wonthaggi, complete with local manufacturing. In 1925, a visiting German engineer and expert on brown coal declared that coal supplies in the Latrobe Valley would last for 1500 years<sup>2</sup>. By the mid-twentieth century, the Latrobe Valley was the epicentre of Victorian industrial development. Its vast coal fields were developed as a State enterprise to supply coal for the large-scale production of briquettes, coal-fired electricity and later, gas. Alongside this, there was also timber-milling, paper manufacturing, and other significant local manufacturing. The Valley had eclipsed Wonthaggi beyond question.

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<sup>1</sup> *Handbook to Victoria: A short description of the colony*, Melbourne, 1877, p. 1; also cited in Sutherland 1888, vol. 2, p. 358.

<sup>2</sup> *Herald*, 27 November 1925, p. 2.

## Aboriginal workers

Aboriginal people in the Latrobe Valley contributed in many ways to the physical work of settlement. From the 1840s, they worked as stockmen, shepherds, shearers, fencers, splitters and general labour on pastoral stations. They were usually paid either meagre wages or were paid in rations (flour, sugar and blankets). A number of Aboriginal people lived at J.P. Turnbull's 'Loy Yang' station, near Traralgon, where they most likely exchanged their labour for rations and an entitlement to camp on the station<sup>3</sup>. It wasn't uncommon for squatters to keep a 'blackboy' as a manservant<sup>4</sup>. One Gunaikurnai man, known as 'Black Joe', remained on his traditional country while working for pastoralists John and David Campbell at 'Traralgon Park'. Another Aboriginal man, Bob Burrows (also known as 'Black Bob'), worked as a boundary-rider for squatter John MacMillan at 'Hazelwood' station in the 1860s. He was a popular figure in the district and was respected as a fine horseman<sup>5</sup>. Aboriginal guides were also employed by settlers in the early 1850s to source access routes to potential goldfields in the mountains, although Aboriginal guides from other parts of Victoria who were not Gunaikurnai were sometimes too frightened to venture into the

steep mountain country around Walhalla and, possibly owing to a superstition or customary law, some feared that they would lose their lives<sup>6</sup>.

From 1847, the Native Police (who were generally not Gunaikurnai) made regular trips through Gippsland and also carried the mail from Traralgon. They also escorted visitors from Melbourne through the rough country to Gippsland, as they did for the Anglican Bishop of Melbourne, Charles Perry, and his wife Frances in 1849<sup>7</sup>. The Native Police were given regular police assignments in the Latrobe Valley through the nineteenth century and at least up until the 1920s and 1930s<sup>8</sup>. This usually involved undertaking searches in the bush, which could be exceedingly difficult country to search<sup>9</sup>. The 'blacktrackers', as they were known, were stationed for many years at the Narre Warren police paddock.

While most Aboriginal people in Gippsland were moved to the Aboriginal reserve at Ramahyuck (and later Lake Tyers), some chose to remain on their country<sup>10</sup>. They lived in camps in the bush and found seasonal work shearing, harvesting, hop-picking and bark-stripping.

3 *Gippsland Farmers' Journal*, 6 December 1889, p. 1.

4 A.W. Howitt provides an example (see Howitt 1904, p. 751).

5 Traralgon Record, 1 May 1914, p. 4; *Gippsland Farmers' Journal*, 6 December 1889, p. 1.

6 Fred Cahir 2012, *Black Gold: Aboriginal people on the goldfields of Victoria, 1850–1870*, ANU E Press, Canberra, p. 36.

7 A.W. Greig, 'The Gippsland Road', *Argus*, 1 February 1941, p. 6.

8 For example, at Moe, see *Gippsland Times*, 3 March 1921, p. 3.

9 For example, 'blacktrackers' were employed at Yinnar (*Morwell Advertiser*, 19 January 1889, p. 3). See also examples in South Gippsland Pioneers' Association 1966.

10 Bain Attwood 1986, 'Off the Mission Stations: Aborigines in Gippsland, 1860–90', *Aboriginal History*, vol. 10, no. 2, pp. 130–51.

## Mining and timber-cutting

Through the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the prevailing types of work in the Latrobe Valley were manual, challenging, often remote, and nearly always dangerous. Apart from the work associated with grazing and farming, these jobs were chiefly in the areas of mining and timber-cutting, and in the construction and maintenance of roads and railways, and they were often short-lived or seasonal. For many men, work often necessitated long absences from home. Settlers did not always bring their wives with them, initially at least. In the bush, and even in the embryonic settlements, it was largely a male domain. Offering the promise of work, Gippsland and the Latrobe Valley attracted many itinerant labourers, who were usually single men often on foot with a swag, happy to rig up camp at a roadside reserve for a period of time before moving on. They shared the road with gypsies, Afghan and Indian hawkers, and Chinese labourers.

The great riverine plain that bordered the Latrobe River was favoured for grazing and farming, but north and south of the river there were pockets of hill country that were worked extensively by axemen and, to a lesser extent, by miners. Miners and timber workers faced significant dangers and risks. They worked in sometimes isolated and remote locations, often in dense forest. They often worked in hilly country, which brought added difficulties. There were accidents with axes and saws, and mishaps occurred while transporting timber — either by horse and dray, or later in trucks on poorly made roads through bogs and other difficult terrain. Weather conditions were not always optimal: there was heavy rain and even snow in winter, and in summer the ever-present dangers of bushfire and snakes.

When the gold rushes began in the rugged mountain country that bordered the north side of the Latrobe Valley, prospective miners needed little more than 30 shillings for a licence fee, along with a few tools, a kettle and a swag. Nonetheless, the 30 shilling fee only entitled a miner to a small area of land, measuring 12 feet by 12 feet<sup>11</sup>. Miners typically took up an individual miner's lease but many also joined a syndicate to pool resources.

The largest gold mine closest to the Latrobe Valley was at Walhalla. From the early 1860s, this drew thousands of hopeful diggers from other mining districts. It was a precarious existence as it was difficult to make a living. Miners established collective means of providing support in times of difficulty, injury or death, as they had done at earlier mining settlements, and established the Stringers Creek Miners' Benefit Association in 1865<sup>12</sup>. Although outside the Latrobe Valley, Walhalla was important to the early economy of local settlements, chiefly Moe, which was the closest railway town to the diggings, and also Toongabbie. The economic depression of the 1890s attracted hopeful diggers who passed through Moe, en route to Walhalla, following news of new gold finds. Walhalla was, for a time, the largest goldmine in Australia. After reaching a population of around 2800 people in 1903<sup>13</sup>, it faced an abrupt decline between 1910 and 1914 when the gold workings were exhausted. Some of the gold diggers would later end up digging coal in the Latrobe Valley.

Timber from the Mountain Ash forests that extended to the northern fringes of the Latrobe Valley was in high demand from the 1870s, and the completion of the Sale to Melbourne railway line in 1879 offered a new and efficient means of transporting timber. An extensive area of the Yarra Valley was reserved for Melbourne water supply purposes in 1872, and by implication became inaccessible to timber workers, much to the frustration of those in the timber industry. No longer able to legally remove timber from the protected Upper Yarra catchment, timber suppliers were forced to look elsewhere<sup>14</sup>. Large timber mills were established in the Latrobe Valley in the 1870s and 1880s — at Toongabbie and in the hills north of Moe, around Yarragon and the northern foothills of the Strzelecki Ranges, in the Narracan Valley, at Traralgon and around Thorpdale. Timber from the Latrobe Valley was used to build fences, houses, bridges and roads. One sawmill in Yinnar cut timber for fruit cases, while forest near Traralgon provided the timber to pave the roads in Melbourne<sup>15</sup>.

11 Dingle 1984, p. 40.

12 Henry Young and John Dixon 1985, *Butler's Woods Point and Gippsland General Directory*, Kapana Press, Bairnsdale (facsimile edition; first published 1866), p. 70.

13 *Australian Handbook*, 1903, cited in 'Walhalla', Victorian Places website: <https://www.victorianplaces.com.au/walhalla>

14 Context Pty Ltd c.2010, 'Maroondah Water Supply Conservation Management Plan'.

15 'Yinnar', Victorian Places website; see William J. Cuthill 1970, *The River of Little Fish*; also cited in Johnston 1991; Jean Court 1974, *The Growth and Development of Traralgon and District*, Traralgon and District Historical Society, p. 10.

Timber-workers were usually contracted by a sawmill operator and paid per log. Tree-felling techniques were physically grueling and often dangerous. One technique was to hammer a sequence of timber pegs into the trunk, which served as a ladder to ascend the tree and lob from the top downwards. Another method was to make a standing platform, or springboard, resting on spars between two trees and on which an axeman would work. Timber-cutting became more than simply a task to clear an area of ground for local use or for small-scale processing in a local mill. In the early twentieth century, logging expanded into a major industry, supported by State legislation and government initiatives, and facilitated by relatively inexpensive leases.

Apart from mining and timber-cutting there were numerous other successful enterprises in the Valley that were operating in the late-nineteenth century and through much of the twentieth, including coal works (discussed below); railway construction; the Traralgon Lime and Cement Company; a pottery works at Morwell; as well as brickworks at Traralgon and later, from the 1920s, at Yallourn<sup>16</sup>.



*Felling a tree at 'Riverdale', Yinnar South, [1910?]* (source: State Library Victoria, Accession No. H42670/7)



*Building the new railway to Yallourn, 1921* (source: State Library Victoria, Accession No. H2009.18/226)

<sup>16</sup> Johnston 1991, p. 13; pottery works, established by 1901; Court 1974, p. 11.



## Farming and the growth of dairying

Up until the 1870s graziers occupied a large area of land within the Valley, its fertile plains well suited to fattening cattle. The take-up of land under the selection acts, from the 1870s onwards, created a patchwork of small holdings across parts of the Valley. Many of those who took up a selection struggled to make a go of it. Clearing timber from the standard 320-acre block was a slow and difficult task, and not a one-man job. Clearing often took many years of toil, and often required the assistance of extra hands and extra horses. There were administrative requirements as well, including visits to the government lands office at Traralgon. Farming on a selection was a family affair, with selectors' wives, sons and daughters assisting in the routine work of life on a selection, which usually included the twice-daily milking duties. Women also churned butter, kept chooks, carted water, chopped wood and set the fires, cared for children and infants, and carried out the usual weekly routine of heavy domestic work of cooking and cleaning, washing and drying clothes, and innumerable other tasks with little or no help. To augment the household economy and to help make ends meet, women also often sold butter and eggs in town, or took in washing or piece-work.

The economic downturn of the 1890s meant that selectors' resources were spread thinly, and yet this period also attracted hopeful cityfolk eager to take up blocks and try their luck at farming. In his monumental work *Australia Unlimited* (1918), E.J. Brady painted a rosy picture of the region in the early 1900s, convinced of the Valley's untold riches and future progress. Certainly, many farmers were successful, but a great many were unable to make a living for various reasons — these included the size of the block; the unsuitability of the land; bushfires, floods and difficult seasons; as well as unexpected family tragedy.

Nevertheless, many selectors managed to make a good living with dairy farming, which was well suited to the lush, well-watered country of the Latrobe Valley. By the 1880s, milk and butter production had become a major local industry. In profiling the notable settlers of the district in the late 1880s, Sutherland included a large number of farmers, many of whom were successful producers of butter<sup>17</sup>. In the 1880s and 1890s large

areas of farming country were taken up by dairy farms. Virtually every farm in the district kept cows to supply milk for the family. Reflecting on farming in the Latrobe Valley in 1900, one journalist noted: 'Every farmer in these parts feels there is something wanting if he has not a few cows; in fact he will find it a difficult matter to make "both ends meet" without the cows'<sup>18</sup>.

The export of butter to Britain became viable in the 1880s with the introduction of an effective refrigeration technique and the new rail line to Melbourne that provided farmers with critical access to markets. Local wayside creameries and co-operative dairy factories appeared throughout the Valley from the early 1890s — for example, at Traralgon in 1890, Glengarry in 1890, Thorpdale South in 1891, Yinnar in 1891, Darlimurla in 1893, Boolarra in 1902, Moondarra in 1904 (which also produced cheese), and Moe in 1905<sup>19</sup>. This network of factories helped to keep dairy farmers viable and secured the future growth of the local dairy industry as well as providing local employment. The Traralgon Butter Factory developed into a large and successful enterprise as did the Moe Dairy Co-op, which established a whole milk bottling plant<sup>20</sup>.

Dairy farmers on a standard-sized selection block could manage a herd of between 20 to 70 cows, all milked by hand, and could make a reasonable living this way well into the twentieth century. A military survey map of the Carrajung region to the south-east of the Valley, dated 1943, shows how prolific the small-scale dairy farms were in this lush region, where every town had its own local butter factory. From Traralgon South to Koornalla and Le Roy there were 33 dairy farms, holding between 25 and 70 cows each<sup>21</sup>. South of Gormandale, the concentration was far greater. However, around Carrajung, Carrajung South and Carrajung Lower some farms, like R. Warren's, had only ten cows and R. Bittner had twelve, but most had 30 to 50 cows.

Whilst the co-operative dairy factories were a boon for farmers in the early twentieth century, the later consolidation of farms and factories — as a means of maximising milk production (and profits) — came at the expense of smaller operations. This had a significant impact on farming practices in the region<sup>22</sup>.

17 Sutherland 1888, vol. 2, pp. 374, 377, 383.

18 *Morwell Advertiser*, 23 November 1900, p. 2.

19 Norman Godbold 1989, *Victoria, Cream of the Country*, Australian Dairy Industry Association, Victorian Division, Hawthorn, pp. 26–27; Gregory Brismead 1987, 'The Development of Butter Factories in Gippsland, 1888–1910', *Gippsland Heritage Journal*, vol. 2, no. 2, 1987, pp. 8–9; Smith vol. 2, 1905.

20 White 1968, p. 142.

21 Victoria, 'Carrajung' [cartographic material] prepared by Australian Section, Imperial General Staff, 1943. Annotated plan provided by Traralgon and District Historical Society. Cartographic material also available online (Australia 1:63,360 topographic series, State Library Victoria).

22 For example, for the decline of Boolarra, see Morgan 1997, pp. 133–34.



*'Feeding time', Jeeralang, against a backdrop of ringbarked gum trees, photographed by Bert Boardman, c.1920s (source: State Library Victoria, Accession No. H99.36/7)*

## The promise of coal

Akin to the many stories of the first gold discoveries in Victoria, there are also stories about early settlers in Gippsland picking up lumps of coal from the ground. In the 1850s, the first blacksmith at Traralgon, P. Phillips, reputedly sourced coal from Rintoull's Creek as fuel for his forge, and in 1862 George McDonald found coal near Morwell<sup>23</sup>. Geological surveys in the 1860s had revealed rich and promising coal seams in the Latrobe Valley<sup>24</sup>. The earliest coal mine to be officially gazetted in the district was the Traralgon Coal Mine in 1867<sup>25</sup>.

As early as the 1860s it was clear that Victoria needed a local coal supply, as the *Argus* pointed out:

*Almost every new industry which takes root amongst us relies upon steam as the motive power of the machinery to be employed, and the number of engines in and around Melbourne is already very great. For these the only fuel is sea-borne*<sup>26</sup>.

Efforts to develop coal-mining continued through the 1870s. A government prize was announced in 1870 for anyone who discovered a coal seam<sup>27</sup>, and an extensive area of 7700 acres near Moe was set aside by the government as a coal reserve<sup>28</sup>. Selectors came across coal seams on their properties and could elect to have mine leases written into their rental agreements<sup>29</sup>. Welsh settler Henry Godridge discovered a large seam of brown coal on the north side of the Latrobe River, six miles north-east of Morwell, which was the genesis of the first large-scale exploitation of brown coal in the area<sup>30</sup>. Through the 1880s, a number of private coalmines emerged, including Hazelwood Coal Mining Co. (1883), Mirboo Coal Co. (1884), Moe Coal Mine (1886), the Great Morwell Coal Mine (1888) and Yarragon Coal Mine (1889).

The first major coal-mining operation in the Valley was the Great Morwell Coal Mining Company, established in 1888, which operated for just over ten years. This company established an open-cut mine on the north side of the Latrobe River to provide fuel for the Victorian Railways and to ease the dependency of Victoria's railways

on unreliable coal supply from NSW. The Great Morwell Coal Mining Company also manufactured briquettes from around 1892, using specialised plant shipped from Germany (which was then a leader in coal technology). Around 1899, the Great Morwell Coal Mining Co. went into liquidation and abandoned the mine.

In the late 1880s, in order to assess the progress and viability of coal-mining, the Victorian government and other authorities turned their attention to the Latrobe Valley. Reporting a new discovery of brown coal outside Moe in 1889, a correspondent for the *Age* pointed out the poor track record of coal-mining to date. He accused the government of '20 years of blundering, succeeded by indifference and nerveless action [and]... lost opportunities ... The [Mines] department has shown no originality, enterprise or appreciation of the subject', even though, in the correspondent's opinion, Gippsland was 'destined to become the Newcastle of Victoria'<sup>31</sup>. The problem was that any potential to exploit a natural resource that was specific to a particular locality was usually left in the hands of private companies or local residents, or sometimes a local council, to pursue, unless there was a potentially larger economic impact, as there was, for example, with the central Victorian goldfields.

While the *Age* correspondent's indignation at the lost opportunities was almost palpable, a royal commission 'to inquire as to the best means of developing and promoting the coal industry of Victoria' had been appointed only the previous month, on 15 July 1889. Their first report, delivered in 1890, made it clear that government assistance was required if coal mining in Victoria had any chance of becoming a 'successful financial undertaking'. Private enterprises had shown themselves to be lacking in confidence, particularly where they were without railway connections to the coal fields. Yet, the commissioners claimed, Victoria had paid NSW nearly £10 million over the last thirty years to purchase coal. They considered that it would be prudent to visit and learn from other countries where brown coal was commonly used. The Great Morwell Coal Company, the Mirboo Collieries and

23 'Early Traralgon' [1871], *Gippsland Farmers' Journal*, 19 June 1914, p. 3; Stephen Legg 1992, *Heart of the Valley: A history of Morwell municipality*, Morwell City Council, Morwell.

24 Robert Brough Smyth 1869, *The Goldfields and Mineral Districts of Victoria*; Johnston 1991; Jack Vines 2008, 'Coal Mining Heritage Study in Victoria', Heritage Council of Victoria, Melbourne.

25 *Gippsland Times*, 30 April 1867, p. 3.

26 *Argus*, 22 February 1864, p. 4.

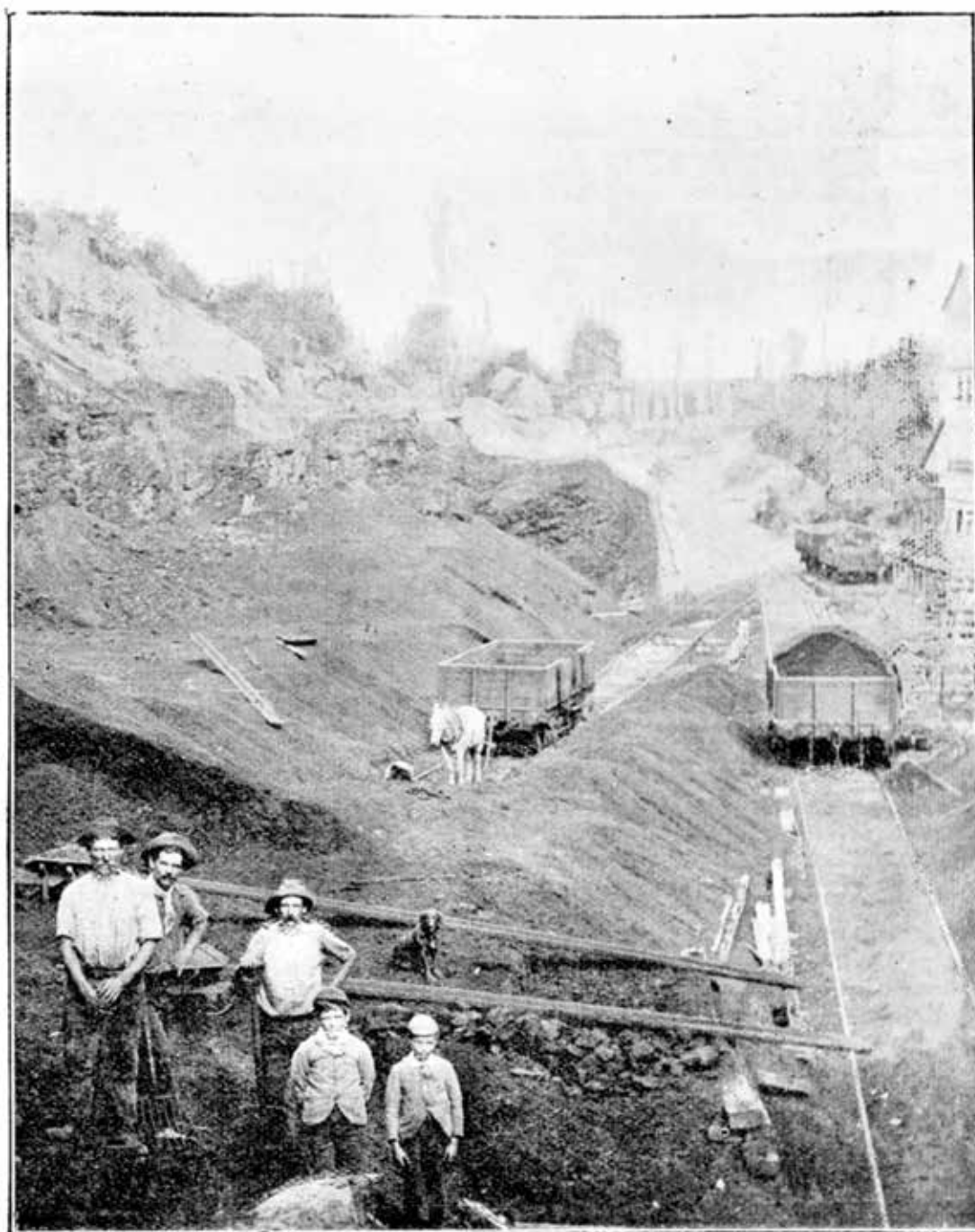
27 South Gippsland Pioneers' Association 1966.

28 'Reserves', *Victorian Parliamentary Papers* 1881, p. 13.

29 South Gippsland Pioneers' Association 1966.

30 Smith 1905, vol. III; *Morwell Advertiser*, 26 April 1934, p. 1; Meredith Fletcher 2015, 'An Overview of Brown Coal Mining and Electricity Generation in the Latrobe Valley', no page numbers.

31 'The coal resources of Victoria. Further discovery of brown coal', *Age*, 7 August 1889, p. 5.



THE GREAT MORWELL MINE.—WORKING AT A SIDING.

*Workers, including young boys, standing at a railway siding of the Great Morwell Coal Mine, 1894 (source: State Library Victoria, Accession No. IAN01/08/94/7-8a)*



the Maryvale Proprietary Company in Morwell were already engaged in coal-mining, but the commissioners had come to the view that relying on NSW for coal was economically risky and that an investment by the Victorian government was necessary to relieve that pressure and to assist private enterprise<sup>32</sup>.

The first and second progress reports of the Royal Commission on Coal in 1889 recommended building a railway system that connected the mines directly to the main railway and hence to Melbourne. It also recommended manufacturing the brown coal into briquettes, which were a superior fuel to raw coal, and highlighted the economic value of by-products such as tar, lubricating oils, dyes and pigments, as well as the clays found in the overburden<sup>33</sup>.

A year later, the *Final Report of the Royal Commission* was able to state with confidence that 'the carbonaceous deposits of Victoria are not only extensive and valuable but practically inexhaustible; [and] that coal-mining may be conducted profitably and a new and important industry established'<sup>34</sup>. A further five recommendations were made to ensure 'fresh legislation' — namely, the establishment of a new branch of the Mines Department; equal footing for coal miners with their counterparts in the goldfields under the Mining on Private Property Act 1884; a bonus to develop black coal mining; and a bonus to manufacture briquettes<sup>35</sup>.

In the mid-1890s a promising new private operation, the Moe Coal Co., was established south of Moe on the Narracan Creek, at a place aptly named Coalville. This company supplied black coal to the railways in the 1890s for a brief period, taking advantage of the branch line from Coalville to Moe<sup>36</sup>. In 1896 there was local disgruntlement that the Victorian Railways had overlooked Coalville and instead contracted a company at Outtrim, near Korumburra, for its annual coal supply. It was cheaper for the government to transport coal direct from Outtrim than from the more out-of-the-way Coalville<sup>37</sup>.

As the potential riches of the Latrobe Valley's brown coal resources were becoming clearer, the region came under greater scrutiny. Over several decades it was the subject of a series of government inquiries, legislative measures and royal commissions. The prime concern of this intense scrutiny was to realise the commercial value of the Valley's vast brown coal beds and to investigate the technology needed to manufacture brown coal briquettes. The stage was set for large-scale government investment in the industrial development of the region.



*Watercolour sketch of Coalville on the Narracan Creek, 1895 (source: State Library Victoria, Accession No. MS15482/FWI)*

32 First Progress Report of the Royal Commission appointed to inquire as to the best means of developing and promoting the coal industry of Victoria, 1890.

33 Final Report of the Royal Commission appointed to Inquire as to the best means of developing and promoting the Coal Industry of Victoria, 1891, p. vi. All three recommendations were accepted and carried out.

34 Royal Commission on Coal, 1891, p. v.

35 Royal Commission on Coal, 1891, p. ix.

36 Adams 1978, pp. 97–104.

37 *Gippsland Farmers' Journal*, 21 February 1896, p. 2.

## A State-run enterprise for winning coal

Unlike gold, coal was regarded as a source of energy and an economic commodity rather than a source of wealth per se. Generally, coal was sourced and extracted in a mood of sober utilitarianism without the hysteria and chaos that often accompanied gold-mining. Private efforts to extract brown coal in Victoria in the nineteenth century had neither been large operations nor commercially successful. A royal commission in 1906 recommended that a state-run coal mine be established. Advice was also sought from Germany in the early 1900s<sup>38</sup>.

Serious investment in coal-mining in the Latrobe Valley began in the early 1900s when a series of coal miners' and transport workers' strikes in NSW hampered coal deliveries to Victoria. In 1916 the Mines Department temporarily reopened the former workings of the Great Morwell Coal Mining Company to alleviate this problem. The Victorian government was concerned that Victorian industry did not continue to be adversely affected by strikes in NSW, and sought a reliable local supply of coal to operate the rail network, to supply local gasworks and factories, and to generate power for Melbourne's expanding industries, as well as for the electric tramways and street lighting of Melbourne's fast-growing suburbs.

From 1916, hundreds of workers flocked to the workings of the Great Morwell Coal Mine on the Latrobe River, north of Morwell, to take up work digging coal, lumping coal into carts, carting coal, bagging coal, and operating machinery. Just as former gold miners had flocked to the State Coal Mine at Wonthaggi when it opened in 1909, former gold miners were also drawn to Morwell and its unimaginatively named 'Brown Coal Mine', which had first been used as a workers' camp for the Great Morwell Coal Mine. The workers' camp also included a number of ex-servicemen, only recently returned from the battlefield, and some miners brought their wives and children. The Brown Coal Mine quickly developed into a crowded makeshift settlement of tents and huts<sup>39</sup>.

Brown Coal Mine was the beginning of large-scale exploitation of the rich brown coal deposits in the Latrobe Valley. What appeared in 1916 as a stop-gap measure to ensure an uninterrupted supply of coal for Victoria's needs soon developed into an ambitious State-run enterprise. The State government commenced mining and

testing the coal deposits at Morwell in 1916 and was keen to act quickly to develop coal-mining as soon as the war ended. Electricity had become an increasingly important commodity during the war years, with the use of electrically driven horse-power engines increasing dramatically. In metropolitan Melbourne, electric tramways were already well-established and plans for the electrification of the suburban railways were expected to be completed by 1922. Up to that time, however, electricity in Victoria had only been generated from black coal, large quantities of which were only available from NSW<sup>40</sup>.

The Victorian Government established an Electricity Commission in 1918 in accordance with the new *Electricity Commission Act*, and in 1921 renamed it the State Electricity Commission of Victoria (SEC). The Electricity Commission was guided by three part-time commissioners who, by July 1920, engaged Sir John Monash to serve as both chairman and general manager. Monash's biographer Geoffrey Serle has suggested that this appointment was influenced by his friendships with Professor T.R. Lyle, the chief commissioner, and with Arthur Robinson, solicitor-general and the architect of the SEC legislation, as well as his own desire for a position that would keep him in Melbourne but reflect the colossal role he had played in the First World War. David Langmore described the Electricity Commission as a 'statutory corporation, sometimes referred to as a state enterprise', with autonomy and independence, and responsible only to a minister and to parliament<sup>41</sup>. This arrangement was perfectly suited to a man of Monash's experience and ambitions, and Monash was the ideal candidate for guiding such a gargantuan undertaking.

When problems emerged with the high-water content of the brown coal, Monash sought expert advice from Germany in c.1920 about how best to convert the coal to briquettes and to fire the coal to produce electricity. Some returned soldiers objected to the involvement from Germany so soon after the end of hostilities<sup>42</sup>. The Solicitor-General and Minister of Public Works, Arthur Robinson, who had been the outspoken patron of the Anti-German League of Victoria during World War I, may also have had some reservations about this<sup>43</sup>. Ultimately, however, the needs of the state-run coal project outweighed wartime feelings of hostility.

38 Fletcher 2015.

39 Cecil Edwards 1969, *Brown Power: A jubilee history of the State Electricity of Victoria*. SEC, Melbourne pp. 60, 63.

40 Robinson 1935, p. 23.

41 Langmore 2013, p. 5.

42 Edwards 1969, p. 67.

43 Helen Doyle 2015, *Suburbs at War*, City of Stonnington, Malvern, p. 25.



*Suited briquette salesmen at Yallourn, c.1940s (source: State Library Victoria, Accession No. H2009.18/26)*

Under the chairmanship of Sir John Monash, the Victorian Government established the SEC to manage and drive the development of this great resource, destined to be the powerhouse for the State. Monash had distinguished himself under the extraordinary pressures of World War I as a brilliant military leader, administrator and logistician. He had an engineering career almost as illustrious as his military career<sup>44</sup>. In the same way that he had managed to keep a battalion of soldiers as engaged and productive as possible, Monash set out to do the same with the employees of the SEC and, in doing so, set in train a new way of life for thousands of mine and power station employees and their families for the next two or three generations.

By 1920, the commissioners had already decided to construct a new 'model town' at Yallourn, and had requested the Chief Architect of the Public Works Department, S.C. Brittingham, to select a site, and to begin work on design and construction. They requested an amendment to the *Electricity Commissioners Act 1918* to give the Commissioners the necessary authority to have 'complete control over the whole of the area acquired by them for their operations at Morwell'<sup>45</sup>.

In 1921 the SEC began work on their first open-cut coal mine. The function of an open-cut operation was to dig the surface of the ground rather than to mine underground. The coal was reached by removing several metres from the top layer of earth, or clay, known as the 'overburden'. The miners were then able to dig deeper and deeper to extract yet more coal. Imported steam dredgers were used for this work, and as the coal was extracted it was transported across the floor of the mine using a purpose-built but temporary railway. Brown coal was dispatched from the Yallourn open-cut, via coal wagons, to the nearby briquette factory. Coal was also fed into the large brick power station, which was erected alongside the mine in 1924.

The infrastructure that was established to power Melbourne, and eventually the rest of Victoria, with electricity from Yallourn, extended well beyond the Latrobe Valley. In a lecture to the Royal Victorian Institute of Architects in August 1922, Sir John Monash explained that the electric current from Morwell would be transmitted at 132,000 volts along transmission lines that would be 90 miles long and would cost £600,000. Six lines of steel wire covered with aluminum would run on steel towers 1000 feet apart and 200 feet

44 Geoffrey Serle, 'Monash, Sir John (1865–1931)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography* online, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/monash-sir-john-7618> (accessed 10 June 2018); Fletcher 2015.

45 Langmore 2013, p. 13.

wide directly from Morwell to Berwick, and would then run north towards Ringwood, then north-westerly towards Bundoora and Thomastown, before passing through West Footscray and finally arriving at Newport<sup>46</sup>.

From 1924, when the electrical power generated at Yallourn was first transmitted to Melbourne, the city's manufacturing industry benefitted from the ready availability of cheap electricity. Yallourn and its open-cut mine provided an enormous supply that was fed to Melbourne and, then across Victoria through the 1920s and 1930s, and into the 1950s, supplying countless country towns with electricity for the first time<sup>47</sup>.

In the case of the Yallourn development, both the transformation and the outcome were industrial. It was planned, efficient, and extensive. Large-scale energy generation transformed the Latrobe Valley from a predominantly agricultural region with a mosaic of small towns and settlements into a region dominated by energy production and punctuated by four main towns: three were the large urban-industrial centres of Moe, Morwell and Traralgon, and the fourth was the model town of Yallourn. A range of services were built for this new industry, just as had been the case with established industries such as gold-mining, timber-cutting and farming over the previous seventy years.



*Briquettes were transported from the Yallourn Briquette Factory (source: Three Decades, 1948)*

46 'The Morwell Electricity Scheme, Victoria', *Building*, 12 August 1922, pp. 21–29.

47 Dingle 1984, pp. 214–15.



## Ray Beebe: a working life with the SEC

Ray Beebe commenced full-time work with the SEC in 1963 at the Yallourn Power Station as an Engineering Cadet in the highly motivated Efficiency Section. During the two-year cadetship he worked in four different departments: the Yallourn Workshops and two in Melbourne. During his Yallourn year, he lived at the Staff Mess, located just outside the Yallourn Main Gate, with a small bedroom and shared bathroom in each wing, and SEC-issue brown linoleum throughout.

Ray returned to the Valley in 1966 to Hazelwood Power Station, where he remained for over five years. Here he worked on plant investigations, field balancing of mills and fans, developing and promoting machine condition monitoring, including the testing of pumps and two different types of turbine at Hazelwood. After a working stint in England, where he studied operations at several power stations, he was moved to Yallourn W Power Station to be the local member of the combustion and milling task force. This work was interesting, and he lost weight running up and down the stairs when carrying out boiler airflow surveys.

In June 1979, he was seconded for a year to Darwin's Stokes Hill Power Station, to make the plant more thermally efficient, as the cost of fuel oil was increasing every week due to the oil crisis at the time. Ray's ideas on thermal efficiency monitoring and improvement had fallen on deaf ears at the SEC, as brown coal was just too cheap to justify attention as to its best use, and the term 'greenhouse gas' was not yet in common usage.

Ray has fond memories of his time with the SEC, which he considered a generous employer that gave him some great opportunities to develop specialist knowledge, to undertake training, and to further his career. On his return to Yallourn W, eleven years after he first worked there, he became Plant Systems Engineer in a major re-organisation, bringing together most of the engineers and technical officers. As a manager he introduced vertical meetings that brought together all levels of operations and workers, which he believes 'helped to break down the old "them and us" mentality'.



*Photo courtesy Ray Beebe.*

Ray enjoyed the camaraderie of the workplace and the lasting friendships forged there. He recalls the several social clubs and especially their Christmas picnics, handing out toys to the long lines of children. Working for the SEC was in fact so enjoyable that an alternative for the SEC acronym, 'Slow, Easy, Comfortable' was often used. Many staff members were involved in community groups and service clubs outside of the SEC. Ray was heavily involved with Scouting as were many others, which led to another alternative name for the SEC: 'Scout Equipment Centre', with items made 'on a pink', for cost of materials only.

## Maryvale paper mill

The extensive forests that included the prized Mountain Ash (*Eucalyptus regnans*), which clothed the Great Dividing Range and reached to the northern edge of the Latrobe Valley, provided some of the most bountiful timber supplies in Victoria. Private sawmills continued to operate in the early twentieth century and at Moe a large timber seasoning works was established<sup>48</sup>. Despite the many uses for timber, a considerable amount of waste was generated by logging. The State government had been buying back a mix of cleared but unused land, regenerated forest, and preserved forest during the 1930s. Some of this forest was cleared in order to be replaced with Radiata Pine, a fast-growing versatile timber that grew well in Victoria<sup>49</sup>.

Proximity to this heavily timbered State forest, which was reserved as Crown Land and relatively accessible from the Valley, was a key factor in the move by Australian Paper Manufacturers (APM), a large public company, to establish the Maryvale Paper Mill in 1937. This was a significant new enterprise in the Valley. Situated between Traralgon and Morwell, the Maryvale Paper Mill relied on the adjacent Latrobe River for its considerable water needs. It was also well positioned to benefit from a ready supply of coal from Yallourn, and it successfully used raw brown coal for steam generation<sup>50</sup>. The mill was established as the result of an agreement between the Victorian government and APM.



*The busy scene at Maryvale pulp mill in the 1960s (source: APM 1955, Trees are a Crop)*



*A steel cannon ball for clearing forest 1950s (source: Under Southern Skies [1955])*



*A pair of timber-cutters at work, 1950s (source: Under Southern Skies [1955])*

48 A.J. McIntyre and J.J. McIntyre 1944, *Country Towns of Victoria: A social survey*. Melbourne University Press, Carlton, p. 75.

49 Julie Constable 2015, 'Reams and Reams of Paper: The Strzelecki Forest campaigns' in Eklund and Fenley 2015, p. 221. 2015, *Earth and Industry*, p. 219.

50 Age, 30 August 1948, p. 2.

The *Wood Pulp Agreement Act* (Vic.) 1936 was passed by the government for the express purpose of allowing APM to acquire timber from Crown land forests that was suitable for producing pulp<sup>51</sup>.

The Maryvale Mill was a great boon for the local economy, which had suffered on account of the Depression of the 1930s. The paper mill employed a large number of people, predominantly men, as timber cutters, carters, plant operators and chemists, and these men and their families required immediate housing in the area. Whilst initially the paper mill only made pulp, by 1940 a huge machine was installed able to make 'brown wrapping paper in one wide sheet which was running out of the machine onto a big roller faster than you can run'<sup>52</sup>. The paper mill became a popular destination for local school excursions as well as a significant employer in the region<sup>53</sup>.

The Maryvale mill initially processed native timbers, however depletion of this resource due to bushfires and logging saw a shift to plantation timber in the 1950s and 1960s. APM steadily acquired additional timber reserves and took over some existing sawmills, including one at Boola Boola in 1950 where it established a forest camp for timber workers (1947–58)<sup>54</sup>. By the mid-1950s, APM Forests Pty Ltd had planted 10,000,000 pine trees on denuded forest land, and this necessitated the construction of 1000 workers' houses, mostly in Traralgon but also in Morwell<sup>55</sup>. APM developed a Forests Department that was responsible for plantation development and also established a silviculture research nursery in Traralgon for breeding suitable tree varieties<sup>56</sup>. APM continued to acquire forest land from the 1960s until the 1990s<sup>57</sup>.



*Maryvale Pulp Mill with its extensive complex of buildings in the 1950s (source: Under Southern Skies, [1955])*

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51 McLaren 1957, p. 44.

52 Cuthill 1970, chapter 7.

53 Cuthill 1970, chapter 7.

54 'Tyers', Victorian Places website.

55 McLaren 1957, p. 45; Cuthill 1970, chapter 7.

56 Barbara Johnston, Traralgon and District Historical Society, pers. com., April 2019.

57 Parish of Jeeralang (parish plan), PROV.





## A.P.M. plants trees for tomorrow

Since 1950, A.P.M. through its subsidiary company, A.P.M. Forests Pty. Ltd., has planted and tended more than 60 million pine and eucalypt trees on large tree farms in Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland.

Some of the early plantings are now being harvested to provide part of the two hundredweight of paper and paper board used by the average Australian each year. A.P.M. is still planting trees, eight million of them every

year. They will be ready for use when today's children are grown up. They are a growing national resource and a big contribution to Australia's development. A.P.M. is helping to shape a better future.



*APM promotional image of children in a young pine plantation, captioned 'APM plants trees for tomorrow', 1974. (Source: Victoria's Resources, 1974, vol. 16, no. 2)*



## War-time and postwar industrial expansion

During the Second World War and the immediate postwar years, the Latrobe Valley became a hub of industry that was unparalleled across regional Victoria. This came about chiefly as a result of the SEC's dramatic expansion of activities, but was also due to broader industrial development encouraged by decentralisation and as well as local initiatives. The State government adopted the policy of the decentralisation of industry in 1943, supporting the establishment of factories in country towns, often for light manufacturing and textiles. This was a means of keeping local economies buoyant in country towns and regional centres that had been suffering decline.

There were increased demands on the primary industry sector and on the manufacturing sector during the Second World War, particularly in regards to food production and textiles. These wartime demands impacted directly on the Latrobe Valley. A wartime call for more flax to make webbing belts for the military, for example, resulted in a new flax mill being planned for Morwell in 1941<sup>58</sup>. The clothing manufacturer Glovers Industries Pty Ltd (part of Julius Kayser Pty Ltd) also opened a branch factory at Moe in 1943 after winning a contract to supply military accessories for the army<sup>59</sup>.

A number of other factories were established in the Latrobe Valley in the 1940s and 1950s on the outskirts of major towns. An industrial zone emerged at Morwell on the north side of the railway line, while new light manufacturing plants were established outside Moe. The stepped parapets, which were common to factories in the 1940s, ornamented the facades of these new industrial enterprises, proudly signaling the spread of industry. The Yarragon Textile Mills Pty Ltd, which opened at Moe in 1960, was the first joint production effort by Australian and Japanese interests in the textile industry<sup>60</sup>. There were several other clothing and footwear manufacturers in Traralgon, including Red Robin Shoes, which operated in the 1960s and 1970s, and a Kiwi shoe polish factory.

As industry and manufacturing expanded in the postwar years, the demand for electricity increased, which was heavily reliant on coal from the Latrobe Valley. In 1948, after thirty years of digging coal at Yallourn, the SEC provided a romanticised view of their operations in a commemorative booklet:

*You will catch something of the spirit and feeling of Yallourn if you stand on the edge of the open cut in the glimmering darkness of a fine, still night. The cut, a hazily luminous abyss of an extent which the night has robbed of definition, stretches vast and mysterious at your feet. Above you the bulk of power station and briquetting factory rise against the stars, amorphous masses flecked here and there with splashes of light. Across the distance, the lights of Yallourn Town twinkle and shimmer from their eminence, back by the low humps of the Haunted Hills.*

*The night is filled with quiet sound, the murmur of never-ceasing industry ... Deep down in the cut, yellow lights move slowly across the blackness. The coal trains are busy hauling their loads for the furnaces. Slowly but unceasingly the yellow blobs, haloed in the dark haze, creep across the void, with occasional blue flashes from their overhead electric gear<sup>61</sup>.*

A key development in the Valley in the immediate postwar period was the Morwell Project, which used the new technology of 'gasification' to generate gas from burning brown coal briquettes, and which was designed to produce enough briquettes to satisfy gas production for Victoria<sup>62</sup>. As part of this plan, the government created the Gas and Fuel Corporation, which was established by an Act of Parliament in 1950. The Gas and Fuel Corporation established a plant at Morwell in 1951 in anticipation of the SEC's proposed second briquette plant and power station. The Morwell Lurgi Brown-Coal Gasification Plant, which cost the extraordinary sum of between £10 and £12

58 *Morwell Advertiser*, 2 October 1941, p. 5; Johnston 1991, p. 12; Legg 1992, p. 209.

59 *Latrobe Valley Express*, 23 August 2018.

60 Moe Historical Society Facebook page.

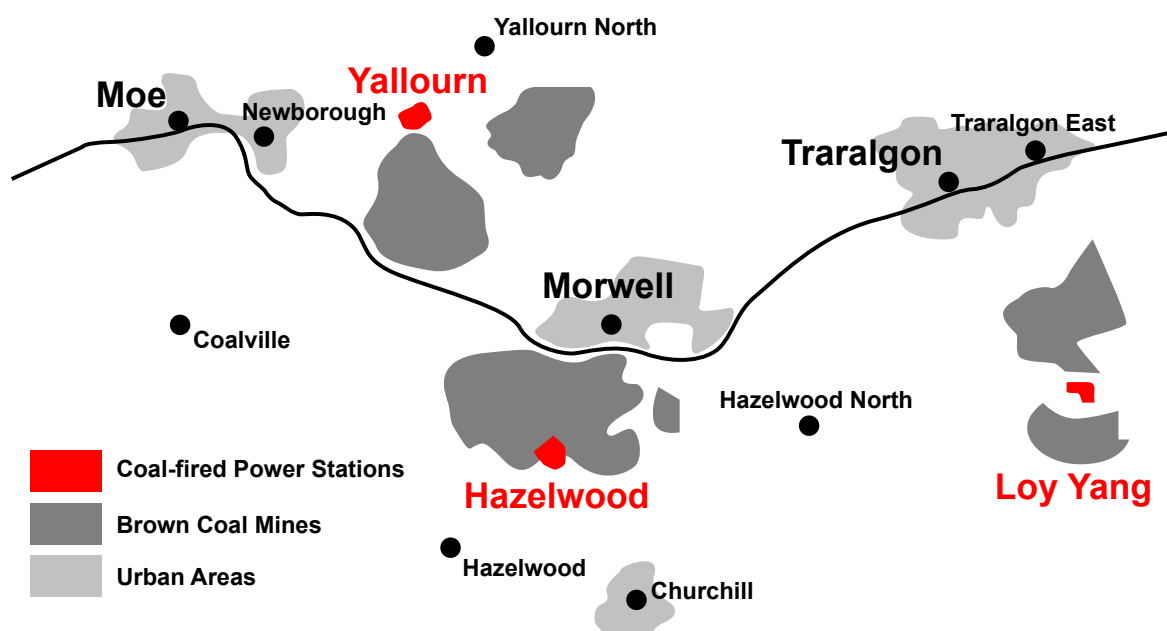
61 SEC 1948, *Three Decades: The story of the State Electricity Commission of Victoria from its inception to December 1948*, p. 111.

62 Goulding 2015.

million, was officially opened by the Duke of Edinburgh on 5 December 1956. Here, synthetic gas was produced from brown coal briquettes with a Lurgi High Pressure Gasification Process.

In the postwar decades the SEC also developed additional open-cut coal mines and power stations in the Valley. Several new power stations were built, including at Yallourn, while Hazelwood power station, planned in 1959, was operating by the 1960s. Yallourn W was erected in the early 1970s and Loy Yang power station was built by the SEC outside Traralgon in the mid-1980s.

The rapid and extensive industrial development of a closely settled region had repercussions. The open-cut mine threw up masses of coal dust and dirt that settled across the nearby townships creating 'an unpleasantness to the household and the businessman in the form of smoke, dust and smell'<sup>63</sup>. In the 1960s the smells from the APM works and the dirt and dust from the mines were all-pervasive and today people still remember the SEC truck driving around Yallourn every week with 'the sucker' to suck the coal dust out of the roofs<sup>64</sup>.



*Location of power stations and brown coal mines of the Latrobe Valley. (Source: Nick Carson, English Wikipedia)*

63 Jerzy Zubrzycki 1964, *Settlers of the Latrobe Valley*, Australian National University, Canberra, p. 24.

64 Community consultation, Moe, 17 May 2018.

## Women's factory work

A significant development that accompanied the growth of manufacturing in the Latrobe Valley, and in particular textiles, was the employment opportunity this created for women. A large number of women were employed in textile and other factories in the Latrobe Valley from the 1940s onwards.

The expansion of coal-fuelled power industry and the timber industry in the 1940s had led to significant population growth in the Latrobe Valley, and as a result there was a ready pool of female labour for factory work. Many of the wives and daughters of SEC workers and Maryvale mill workers took up positions as machinists and trainees at a number of new textile factories in the region. A shortage of male workers during the Second World War provided women with easier avenues into paid work. This gave women much needed work during wartime. After the war, newly arrived European migrant women also joined the workforce.

Glovers clothing factory, which opened in 1943, employed a large number of married women<sup>65</sup>. La Mode Industries Pty Ltd, a Melbourne-based manufacturer of women's underclothing, opened a factory in Morwell in 1944. A second La Mode factory opened at Traralgon in 1945 for the manufacture of corsets. Initially it occupied temporary premises, with plans for a new



*Workers at the Glovers Factory, Moe (source: Goulding 2016, Settlement to City, p. 40)*



*La Mode factory, Traralgon, c.1950s (source: State Library Victoria, Accession No. H32492/3568)*

factory<sup>66</sup>. Other textile factories included Yarragon Spinning Mills in Moe, built in 1960 (later the Rocklea Spinning Mills); the Melbourne-based Givoni, which opened a factory in Moe in the 1960s for the sewing and finishing of garments; Valentine Lee and Staff, which operated in Moe in the 1980s<sup>67</sup>. The building used by La Mode in Traralgon was later occupied by Kayser<sup>68</sup>. From August 1967, the La Mode plant at Morwell was occupied by electronics firm L.M. Ericssons, and was used for the assembly of electrical parts<sup>69</sup>.

From the 1940s, young women were also employed in large numbers at the Maryvale paper mill. They worked in counting and packing, and in the finishing room<sup>70</sup>. Women also worked at the SEC in increasing numbers from the 1960s and 1970s, chiefly in clerical and administrative roles<sup>71</sup>. Women who worked for the SEC were expected to leave work once they were married. This eventually changed in the 1970s and 1980s.



*The factory workers at Ericssons, Morwell, were largely women, c.1967 (source: Morwell Historical Society)*



*Women workers at the Maryvale Paper Mill, 1944 (source: Weekly Times, 14 June 1944, p. 13)*

<sup>65</sup> Age, 9 December 1943, p. 3.

<sup>66</sup> Argus, 10, July 1945, p. 4, 22 March 1949, p. 2.

<sup>67</sup> Age, 18 July 1986; Goulding 2015, p. 72.

<sup>68</sup> 'Traralgon Drill Hall', Victorian Heritage Database (online).

<sup>69</sup> Zubrzycki 1964, pp. 8–9.

<sup>70</sup> Weekly Times, 14 June 1944, p. 13.

<sup>71</sup> Edwards 1969.

## 'Lovely La Mode Corsetry'

The arrival of La Mode Industries Pty Ltd in Morwell in 1944 was a welcome local development, not simply for the provision of much-needed employment for women.

Laid out on 'park-like grounds of seven acres', La Mode appealed to young women as an exciting place to work. There was a hint of glamour about the place with its modern workrooms painted in pleasant colours, a staff canteen and the much-anticipated annual ball<sup>72</sup>.

While their brothers could learn a trade at Yallourn Technical School, working-class girls were encouraged to take a factory job that provided on-the-job training. Shortly before its official opening, La Mode advised that the company was about to commence 'a School of Corset making and designing' and called on local girls, aged between 15 and 17, to apply for training in all aspects of corset-making.

The new factory provided employment to girls (over 15) and women from across the Valley and operated a private bus service for workers outside Morwell: from Yallourn, Traralgon, Mirboo North, Moe and Trafalgar.

Upon opening, La Mode had employed 160 women and was looking to employ a total of 300. One year after opening, an observer at La Mode noted that the 'vast workroom seemed to be bulging with the intensity of the activity within its walls'.

'Lovely La Mode Corsetry' represented the latest 'mode' in women's undergarments. The company's tailored corsets helped to define the ideal shape of the 1950s, the so-called 'New Look'. In the highly male-centric industrial landscape of the Latrobe Valley, La Mode represented a distinctly female working space. Amidst the dirt and dust, the briquette factories and the paper mill, the creation of fashionable feminine items was a welcome enterprise.



Left: La Mode machinist, c.1950s (*Argus Souvenir Supplement*, 1954). Right: Pink brassiere manufactured at the La Mode factory, 1950s, from the collection of the Orbost Historical Society (source: *Victorian Collections*)

<sup>72</sup> *Argus*, 22 March 1949, p.2

<sup>73</sup> *Morwell Advertiser*, 12 July 1965'



*Advertisement for female employees, 1946 (Morwell Advertiser, 4 April 1946)*

Like the role of the SEC (for men), La Mode offered female workers more than simply an opportunity for paid work. It was a place where women developed valued friendships and social connections. It was with great regret that workers faced the closure of the La Mode factory in Morwell in 1964. Cora Gandy had worked at La Mode for seventeen years. She felt it was a great pity for the factory to close down as it had been 'a part of the Latrobe Valley'<sup>73</sup>.



*Pink girder manufactured at the La Mode factory, 1950s (source: Museum Victoria)*



## Working for the SEC

Under John Monash, the SEC ran a seemingly smooth operation. There were some bumps along the road to full operations from which the public, and sometimes the government, were carefully shielded.

The military influence over the power-generating industry in the Valley continued well after the death of Monash in 1931. Brigadier John Field was appointed to the role of assistant general superintendent 'of the Yallourn Territory of the SEC' in December 1946, becoming acting general superintendent in December 1950 and general superintendent at Yallourn in March 1951<sup>74</sup>. By this time, the SEC's Yallourn and Morwell projects employed 7551 people<sup>75</sup>.

The SEC has since provided more employment in the Latrobe Valley than any other industry, eventually retaining 'seven times more employees than the largest employer in the region'<sup>76</sup>. Throughout the SEC's time in the Valley — covering seventy-five years, from 1919 to 1994 — the relationships between management and workers have been described as 'appear[ing] to have been at least publicly harmonious'<sup>77</sup>, particularly in the earlier decades. Almost from the beginning, the SEC incorporated unions into their organisational structure. While this was unusual at the time — even unheard of — in corporate practice, the SEC itself was a unique institution and well known for its paternalism. The role of the SEC at Yallourn was all-encompassing.

Whilst there were some grievances about its controlling role, the SEC was by many accounts a fair and reasonable employer. It looked after its employees, and offered many benefits for workers. The poet and one-time coal digger at Yallourn, John Shaw Neilson, preferred to work for the SEC than the Victorian Railways (he had worked for both) because the SEC provided fresh water and reasonable houses for workers, whereas the water that the Victorian Railways carted to the navvies' camps smelt like dead fish<sup>78</sup>.

In the 1970s around 20 per cent of the working population in the Latrobe Valley was employed by the SEC. The SEC was as critical to the local economy as it was essential to Melbourne and Victoria's essential services infrastructure. Most who worked for the SEC did so with pride in the larger operation of which they were a part. Working men (they were overwhelmingly male workers) usually had a lifelong association with the SEC. Many had grown up with fathers or uncles employed by the SEC. Many began their employment as an apprentice, whilst completing training at the Yallourn Technical School. Those at Yallourn were housed by the SEC, and all SEC workers had health care provided as well as other services.

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74 'This Field of Power', Gippsland Newspapers Special Feature, issued with Yallourn Live Wire, Moe Advocate, and Morwell Advertiser, 8–9 April 1964.

75 'This Field of Power', Gippsland Newspapers Special Feature, issued with Yallourn Live Wire, Moe Advocate, and Morwell Advertiser, 8–9 April 1964, p. 7.

76 Kathryn Steel 2007, 'The 1977 State Electricity Commission of Victoria maintenance workers' strike' in J. Kimber, P. Love and P. Deery (eds) 2007, *Labour Traditions: Proceedings of the Tenth National Labour History Conference*, accessed 12 June 2018, p. 179.

77 Steel 2007, pp. 178–79.

78 John Shaw Neilson 1978, *The Autobiography of John Shaw Neilson*, National Library of Australia, Canberra, p. 104.



*SEC shift workers leaving Yallourn power station, late 1940s (source: Three Decades, 1949)*

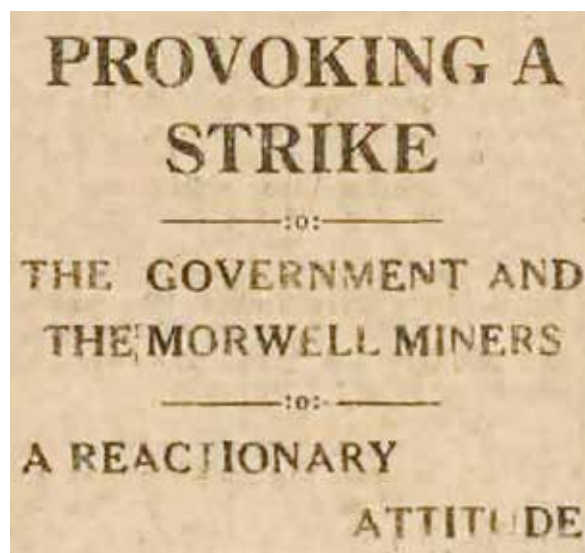
## Workers united, and divided

Coal-mining was dangerous work, involving long hours and shift work. Accidents and injuries were common, and respiratory and skin diseases were rife. Coal miners were also susceptible to scoliosis. Many of the early gangs at Brown Coal Mine and Yallourn in the 1920s were managed by contractors and there was often a constant fear of being laid off. The poet John Shaw Neilson who worked at Yallourn in its early days, for example, noted the likelihood of not being kept on<sup>79</sup>.

The first union to represent the interests of Victorian coal miners was the Victorian Coal Miners' Association, established in 1907; this was taken over by the Australasian Coal Miners Association (1913–16) and then by the Australasian Coal and Shale Employees Federation (1916–90)<sup>80</sup>. Other SEC workers in the Valley were represented by the Builders Labourers Federation, and by the Federated Engine Drivers and Fireman's Association of Australasia, for which there was a sub-branch at Yallourn.

Union activity on the NSW coalfields was a critical factor in the Victorian Government's resolve to establish a coal mine and power station that were independent of NSW, and to establish the SEC. Unionism and industrial unrest amongst miners, as well as workers in general, had escalated in Australia in the early twentieth century. Arthur Robinson, who as attorney-general for Victoria was responsible for establishing the SEC, pointed out many years later that 'coal strikes in New South Wales occurred with monotonous regularity'<sup>81</sup>. There were 20 coal miners' strikes during 1905, another in 1907, and a four-month stoppage in 1909 that led to the Victorian Government opening the State Coal Mine at Wonthaggi. There were further strikes in 1911 and 1913, and long strikes in 1914, 1915 and 1917. On 25 September 1917, gas and electricity were restricted to only a few hours a day for domestic purposes, and a week later to just three days a week for industrial purposes. A Brown Coal Advisory Committee, established in 1917, recommended an open-cut mine and a power station in Morwell to generate and transmit electricity<sup>82</sup>. Meanwhile, private operators commenced operations at Brown Coal Mine in 1916.

The glowing impression in the 1920s of the new model town of Yallourn, with its pleasant garden city layout and modern facilities, was somewhat at odds with the degree of industrial unrest amongst workers at Yallourn and Brown Coal Mine during that decade. The decade had begun with an industrial discontent at Brown Coal Mine between 1918 and 1921. The long-running dispute over the Hibble Award in 1920–21 caused stop-work action at Brown Coal Mine until a deal was finally struck. The Morwell coalies argued that they were entitled to the same rate of pay as the miners at Wonthaggi, but it was ruled that digging brown coal at Yallourn was a different activity to coal-mining at Wonthaggi, which involved dangerous tunnel-work<sup>83</sup>. There were a number of strikes at Yallourn and Brown Coal Mine through the 1920s. In 1924, when 200 miners stopped work over pay, and again in May 1925 and 1926. The 1925 strike was of great concern to the SEC, with 1000 men stopped work, including the engineers<sup>84</sup>. In early 1927 there was yet another strike that affected electricity supply to Melbourne. This dispute began when coal-handlers at Yallourn, who were members of the Australian Workers' Union, stopped work after alleged bullying behavior by the foreman; the engineers also stopped work in sympathy<sup>85</sup>.



1918: Newspaper reports of industrial unrest at Morwell  
(source: *Ballarat Echo*, 1918)

79 Erik Eklund 2016, 'Coal and Industrial Relations: How miners secured workers' rights' in *The Conversation*, 10 June 2016, <https://theconversation.com/coal-and-industrial-relations-how-miners-secured-workers-rights-53371>.

80 Australian Trade Union Archives: <http://www.arua.org.au>

81 Sir Arthur Robinson 1935, 'Mining and secondary industries in Victoria: One of a series of five centenary lectures on "A century of development in Victoria", arranged by the University of Melbourne', 26 March 1935, pp. 19, 24–25.

82 Robinson 1935, pp. 19, 24–25.

83 *Age*, 14 December 1920, p. 7.

84 *Age*, 4 November 1926, p. 10. See extensive coverage of this action in the newspapers, 1924–26.

85 *Australasian*, 26 March 1927, p. 48.

Industrial unrest re-emerged in the early 1930s, although this was felt more strongly at Wonthaggi than at Morwell. The Yallourn Trades and Labour Council was established in 1932 as a collective voice for the workers. It gradually expanded its representation across the Latrobe Valley to the extent that it was renamed the Central Gippsland Trades and Labour Council in 1947 and later modified to the Gippsland Trades and Labour Council (GTLC)<sup>86</sup>. Its focus was nonetheless on the unions operating in the SEC, 'which became a centre of industrial activity due to its size, complexity and union strength of its workforce'<sup>87</sup>. SEC workers were appreciative and spoke highly of cases where union members who were members of the GTLC were given time to develop 'the social side of the community'. Other unions and industry groups in the Latrobe Valley included the Victorian Teachers' Union, the Primary Producers' Union and the Victorian Dairy Farmers' Association<sup>88</sup>. By 1955, the GTLC represented unions from Warragul to Traralgon, and lobbied throughout the 1950s on behalf of a wide-reaching working population.

Australia entered the Korean War towards the end of June 1950 and in order to finance this military commitment the Menzies government drastically cut loan funding to all states. The 30 per cent cut to Victorian government spending had a huge impact in the Latrobe Valley. The simmering political antagonism towards communism, and its perceived threat to Australia, became closely linked with union activity and industrial action<sup>89</sup>. The fear of communism and its infiltration into the unions came most strongly from the Catholic faction of the Australian Labor Party. In 1951 Frank Scully, the Labor Member for Richmond and later a founding member of the Democratic Labour Party, rallied unionists at a Catholic Communion Breakfast at Morwell to 'root the Communists' out of the unions. He declared that "whoever controlled coal would win the day" and warned that was why "Communists were moving into the Latrobe Valley"<sup>90</sup>. By 1952, any semblance of harmony between and within the unions dissolved as the government, unions and workers accused each other of supporting communism at the expense of the people, industry and nationally significant infrastructure of the Latrobe Valley<sup>91</sup>. Mindful of the labour

affiliations of many amongst its faithful, the Catholic Church took firm measures to strengthen ties with the labour movement and welcomed new migrant workers, many of whom were Catholic countries. In 1954, St Teresa's Catholic Church in Yallourn hosted a men's Communion breakfast, reaching out to all new workers in the surrounding towns, including new immigrants. The speakers appealed to those gathered to recall the events in Italy in 1948 that saw the country threatened with communism<sup>92</sup>. The disharmony amongst Catholics within the Labor Party over the threat of communism ultimately led to the Split in the Labor Party in 1955, but historian Patrick Morgan argues that the Split was managed moderately well in Gippsland<sup>93</sup>. Nevertheless, the fear of communism and its perceived threat in the Latrobe Valley persisted, with the leading Catholic conservative and opponent of communism, B.A. Santamaria, publishing a provoking booklet, *Communism Returns to Yallourn*, in 1960.

As the repercussions of the 1951 Federal funding cuts began to be felt in the Latrobe Valley, industrial action increased. A raft of projects that were underway or planned in the Latrobe Valley were frozen, deferred or abandoned altogether<sup>94</sup>. The Valley's local newspapers had plenty to say on the matter. 'Loans Cut to Affect Morwell', cried the *Morwell Advertiser*, describing the funding cuts and anticipated retrenchments of employees of the Housing Commission of Victoria, the SEC, the Gas and Fuel Corporation's Morwell Project, the Soldier Settlement Commission, the Hospital and Charities Commission, the Public Works Department, the State Rivers and Water Supply Commission, the Victorian Railways and the Country Roads Board. There were large-scale retrenchments across many of these bodies and a projected 40 per cent reduction of 11,000 SEC staff<sup>95</sup>. At the Maryvale Paper Mill in September 1952, APM dismissed 180 workers and at a subsequent meeting attended by 650 colleagues, and addressed by the President of the GTLC and the Building Trades' and Metal Trades' Federations, a resolution was passed: 'That we the workers at Maryvale demand the resignation of the Menzies Government because of their policy of unemployment designed to forward their War Programme'<sup>96</sup>. It appeared to many workers

86 Steel 2007, p. 179.

87 Steel 2007, p. 179.

88 *Gippsland Times*, 22 April 1954, p. 2.

89 *Morwell Advertiser*, 25 October 1951, 1 May 1952, p. 8; Age, 15 September 1951, p. 11.

90 *Morwell Advertiser*, 10 May 1951, p. 1.

91 *Morwell Advertiser*, 1 May 1952, p. 8.

92 *Morwell Advertiser*, 6 September 1954, p. 11.

93 For discussion of the role of the anti-Communist industrial groups in the unions, see Patrick Morgan 1991, 'The Irish in Gippsland', in Philip Bull et al. (eds), *Irish-Australian Studies* 1990, p. 134.

94 *Morwell Advertiser*, 13 September 1951, p. 1.

95 *Gippsland Times*, 13 September 1951, p. 6; *Morwell Advertiser*, 13 September 1951, p. 1.

96 *Morwell Advertiser*, 4 September 1952, p. 12.



in the Valley that all the civic work of previous decades to develop this region was being threatened by political and economic forces well beyond the Valley itself.

In 1966 SEC workers in the Valley persisted in striking for ten days over wages and conditions, despite return-to-work orders given by Trades Hall Council. A total of 22 unions were involved and 3200 SEC workers in the Valley alone went on strike, with another 1200 in Melbourne. With no coal-winning happening at the Morwell open-cut mine, the Hazelwood power station ceased operations and Yallourn remained the only power producer for the state. As a result, power restrictions were enforced across Victoria.

The Latrobe Valley faced an industrial crisis as strikes continued throughout the 1960s and the unions acted with increased militancy. Tensions came to a head in the Valley in 1972 when the first six days of an eventual 14-day strike saw 150,000 laid-off workers lose \$12 million in wages and the Victorian Chamber of Manufacturers estimate an industry-wide cost of \$32 million in lost production<sup>97</sup>. The strike only ended when Bob Hawke, then president of the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU), promised ACTU representation for the workers' cause<sup>98</sup>. Arbitration dragged on, however, and the Victorian community was at the mercy of erratic power supply throughout the 1970s<sup>99</sup>. The cost to business was reported to be so high that in September 1972, 1000 workers were sacked from the new Hazelwood power station as 'industrial disputes were making the job uneconomical'<sup>100</sup>.

However, a demand by construction workers involved in a pay dispute in June of 1972 suggests local conditions were distressing with workers wanting 'a statement by the SEC on future employment in the valley ... [as] ... they see the prospect of working themselves out of a job and turning Morwell, Moe and other centres into near ghost towns'<sup>101</sup>. Those with long memories of the Valley may well have been thinking of the towns that had already disappeared following the decline of earlier industries: first gold, then butter factories, then timber milling.

Just as the Victorian Government had created the Latrobe Valley's 'powerhouse', partially in

response to union-driven uncertainty, it began the process of winding down their involvement in the Latrobe Valley's power industry in the 1970s. A new power plant was erected at Newport in Melbourne, which was considered less vulnerable to industrial action than the power stations in the Valley<sup>102</sup>. In a dramatic development from the late 1970s, the established and admired township of Yallourn was demolished in order to mine the brown coal beneath it<sup>103</sup>. Contemporary newspaper reports of union and SEC industrial action rarely comment on the impact of the instability.

Discontent continued despite the efforts of unions and the support of Valley communities. From August to October 1977 there was a protracted eleven-week strike of SEC maintenance workers in the Latrobe Valley that led Victorian Premier Rupert Hamer to declare a state of emergency. There were picket lines and mass union meetings in the Valley, and large protest marches in Melbourne. The strike had extensive media coverage, and there were dramatic images in the Melbourne newspapers of workers burning the letters they received from the SEC threatening them to return to work<sup>104</sup>. ACTU Secretary Bob Hawke described the strike as the most serious since the Second World War<sup>105</sup>. Community support for the strike appears to have been strong. One commentator explained: 'the women played a fantastic role ... and the role of the [Morwell] Credit Co-operative which at one stage had loaned out \$200,000'<sup>106</sup>. The industrial action taken in 1977 is believed to have led to the introduction of award wages across all trades some years later, and to have encouraged some decentralisation of union and SEC negotiations, thereby enabling locally based and more successful union negotiations<sup>107</sup>. Union membership across Australia began to decline in the 1990s due to an increase in privatisation of state enterprises and other structural changes within the economy<sup>108</sup>.

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97 *Canberra Times*, 8 February 1972, p. 3.

98 *Canberra Times*, 16 February 1972, p. 1.

99 *Canberra Times*, 8 June 1972, p. 11; 22 June 1972, p. 8; 23 June 1973, p. 1; 9 October 1973, p. 3; and 6 November 1973, p. 7.

100 *Tribune*, 26 September 1972, p. 4.

101 *Tribune*, 6 June 1972, p. 12.

102 *Tribune*, 1 July 1975, p. 12.

103 *Tribune*, 1 July 1975, p. 12.

104 See for example, the photographs collected at Radical Times: <http://radicaltimes.info/PDF/SECstrikePhotos.pdf>

105 *Age*, 21 October 1977, p. 2.

106 Wicks, n.d. p. 14.

107 Steel 2007, p. 188.

108 ACTU, n.d., p. 11.

## New industries

With the development of major new industries in the Latrobe Valley in the 1920s and 1930s, a range of new occupations and services emerged in the main towns to support the various industries and their growing workforce. This included builders, blacksmiths, school teachers, publicans, shopkeepers and travelling salesmen, and various government officials. Many small towns that were located close to the new sites of industry also experienced growth at this time.

People were attracted to the Valley for employment opportunities, whether it was specialist work associated with the SEC or the timber industry, the construction of new homes, or the wide range of positions in the service sector. By the 1940s and 1950s, the towns of Moe, Morwell and Traralgon were developing into large urban centres, where the range of employment opportunities matched those of suburban Melbourne. Large retail establishments, such as Purvis Stores in Moe, with its catchcry 'Purvis for Service', employed a large number of male and female staff. Paynes at Morwell and several large stores at Traralgon also employed many locals people.

Whilst the coal and timber industries dominated the Valley and areas of employment, there was a range of other industries, including textiles and other forms of manufacturing, and dairy factories. There was also employment available in a variety of commercial and professional areas, and in government services that were typical of those found in small towns and regional centres, including schools, hospitals, and railways.

The large industrial enterprises that began in the Valley in the 1920s and 1930s experienced enormous postwar growth. Thousands of workers were employed by the SEC across multiple industrial complexes in the Valley, including open-cut mines, power stations and briquette factories. The Maryvale paper mill also grew significantly. By 1959, it was producing 80,000 tonnes of paper pulp and 60,000 tonnes of 'kraft' paper (that is, paper produced by the 'kraft' method<sup>109</sup>) and a chemical plant was built to supply caustic soda, chlorine and other chemicals<sup>110</sup>. Over 1300 employees were engaged and APM built 1000 houses for them as well as hostels, boarding houses and services to support the paper-mill workers and their families. Many of these houses survive in the housing estates in Morwell, and in Grey and Kay Streets, Traralgon, where the senior staff lived. The transit camp at Derham's Hill, however, which accommodated about 500 workers in 1956, no longer exists<sup>111</sup>. Much of the native forests have been cleared and replanted. More than a century after settlement when logging began in earnest, only 19 per cent of native forest remained in the Strzelecki Ranges<sup>112</sup>.

There was a rapid growth in secondary industries across the Valley from the 1940s. One successful local business was Focus Photo Labs in Moe, which was founded by Matt Broeren in the 1970s. Broeren established the successful 'Aussie School Photos' enterprise that has been used by hundreds of schools across Victoria<sup>113</sup>.

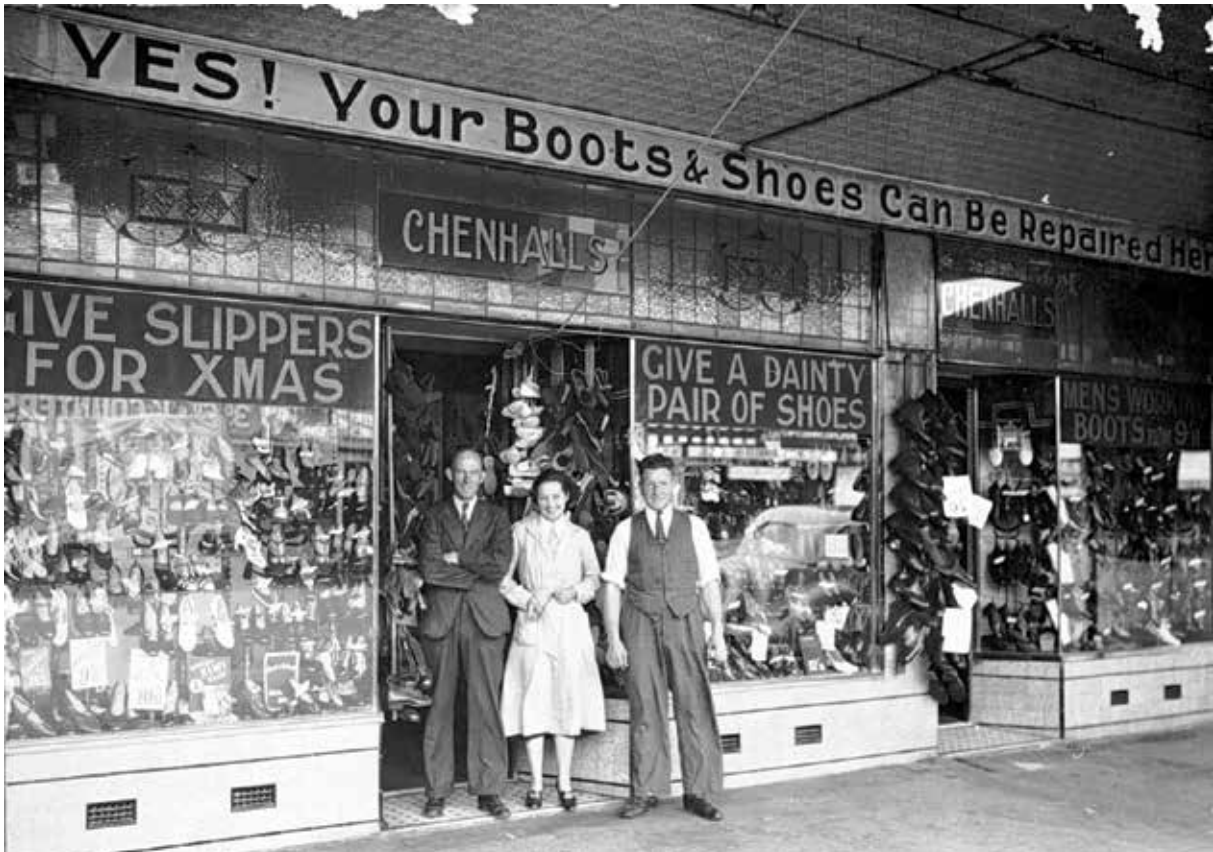
109 APM, *Trees Are a Crop*.

110 Cuthill 1970, chapter 7.

111 Context 2010, 'Latrobe Valley Heritage Study', vol. 1, pp. 48, 50.

112 Zubrzycki 1964, p. 8.

113 *Coach News*, June 2007.



*Chenhall's shoe shop in Traralgon, c.1930s (source: Museum Victoria)*

## Privatisation and economic downturn

Privatisation and deregulation of the SEC in the Latrobe Valley began in the mid-1990s. The process began with the disaggregation of the various components under the State Labor government in 1993, but Jeff Kennett's Liberal government saw the sale of the state-owned SEC and the Gas and Fuel Corporation through to completion by the late 1990s. Kennett has since conceded that the government's actions should have done more to take into account the effects of privatisation of a long-established government-owned employer and the impact of rapid change on the community<sup>114</sup>. Since the sale of SEC to private interests, some of the plants have been closed, including the Morwell power station and briquette factory in 2014, and Hazelwood power station in 2017.

The decision to sell the assets of the SEC has had a profound impact in the Latrobe Valley, not only in terms of the restructuring of workplaces and the retrenchment of staff, and the loss of the broader social infrastructure that the SEC had created, but also in terms of the challenge this posed to the broader mindset about economic stability and unfettered development. Historian Meredith Fletcher has identified the double sense of loss suffered by the SEC workers: first the loss of the town of Yallourn in the 1970s and, twenty years later, the loss of the very structure of work that they had known<sup>115</sup>. Many of those who found themselves out of work were the younger staff and the older, more experienced workers. The private corporations that took over the SEC's operations in the Latrobe Valley did not follow the paternalistic model of the SEC. There was a decline in apprenticeship programs, a lack of work security, and growing unemployment across the region. Many workers felt a sense of injustice and betrayal about the enormous changes, and experienced feelings of pessimism, loss and abandonment. For many families, where several generations had worked for the SEC in the Valley for almost one hundred years, it was a shock that would take a long time to adjust to. For many, the SEC was all they had known, and the culture of the SEC had defined not only working life, but had also permeated so much else about living in the Valley.

Kathryn Steel has explained that 'the shock over the corporatisation and privatisation overwhelmed the strong sense of community and divided the unions which protected their own interests during this period'<sup>116</sup>. Changes to the

Latrobe Valley's union movement following the privatisation era included a reduction in membership and also a reduction in the number of unions as many unions merged. Dealing with multiple private corporations rather than single entities, such as the SEC, meant that industrial action was harder to coordinate<sup>117</sup>. In 2010, however, Gippsland Asbestos Related Diseases Support (now the Asbestos Council of Victoria) and the GTLC together were able to persuade the Environmental Protection Authority to form an interagency group and to focus on the serious problems in the Valley caused by asbestos in the home<sup>118</sup>.

The GTLC today includes 24 affiliated unions and approximately 12,000 members across many industries, including manufacturing; education; meat; nursing and midwifery; communications, electrical and plumbing; construction, forestry, mining and energy; media, entertainment and arts; tertiary education; transport; textile, clothing and footwear; and firefighters<sup>119</sup>. One local resident reflects:

*Unionism in the Valley I would still say is damn strong. The only thing they [unionists] haven't got now is the power they had before certain legislation was introduced. They used to teach the people in Melbourne what it's like not to have electricity for twenty-four hours<sup>120</sup>.*

There are still strong memories and affiliations within the community associated with the height of union activity during the 1960s and 1970s.

By the late 1990s and early 2000s, growing uncertainty about the sustainability of large-scale industrial activity in the Valley, notably coal-fired power stations with their high carbon emissions, but also the harvest of native forest for paper-manufacture, hung like a shadow over the Valley. Peoples' livelihoods had relied on these industries for several generations. For many it was the reason why they had settled in the Valley in the first place. Compounded by this sense of loss was the impact of widespread health issues connected with asbestos, which had been used extensively in the Valley for public housing, and in the industrial infrastructure of the power stations. The Valley was facing another point of transition. The Latrobe City Council adopted a new branding phrase, 'A New Energy', and worked to progress a different view of the Valley's future.

114 Sydney Morning Herald, 12 December 2009.

115 Fletcher 2015.

116 Steel 2007, p. 183.

117 Steel 2007, p. 183.

118 Cancer Council, 2010, vol. 34, no. 3, November 2010.

119 GTLC website, n.d., accessed 19 June 2018.

120 Community consultation, Moe, 18 May 2018.







# 03

## Chapter 3: Communities

The Latrobe Valley is made up of many communities, which have been forged and often transformed throughout the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The story of community in the Latrobe Valley encapsulates the stories of rich and varied lives, and of experiences shaped by class, gender and ethnicity. This section examines the notion of community in the Latrobe Valley, including the impact of colonisation on Gunaikurnai community life, the development of settler communities in the nineteenth century, industrial communities in the twentieth century, new residential communities, migrant communities and the overall rich diversity of community life over the last one hundred years. This section also looks at economic and social change, and its challenges and ramifications for community life.



## First peoples

Gunaikurnai society and culture developed from and with the land, water and natural resources. Their customs and traditions guided their relationships, interaction and connections with their country, their kin and immediate clans, and the wider population. According to the nineteenth-century ethnographer and anthropologist Alfred Howitt, Kurnai society had no class system<sup>1</sup>. Elders were respected by all members of the community; they were responsible for teaching these customs and traditions, and for providing advice or guiding their community where needed. Obedience was expected from the young. Anything from a minor dispute to a serious crime was dealt with by what might be called a court of community, rather than a court of law. Decision-making was democratic and decisions were reached no matter how long it took to reach that point. On occasion clans would gather to hold corroborees. These events lasted several days and strengthened relationships between different communities through trade and celebration. These were also opportunities for the all-important initiation ceremony and enabled or required those who were undergoing initiation to show what they had mastered<sup>2</sup>.

Rules of custom and tradition guided the way the land was treated, utilised and respected. These rules also guided the obligations of war, justice, trade, knowledge, medicine and healthcare. Passing on this knowledge was a continuous process that began at a very young age. By the time a girl or a boy reached adulthood, he or she was proficient in the knowledge they would need in order to live life in strict accordance with custom and tradition. This included hunting and gathering, fishing, battle, medicine, cooking and maintaining social order. Only when this knowledge had been satisfactorily acquired did initiation take place — the 'graduation ceremony' that secured their place in the adult world<sup>3</sup>.

The Gunaikurnai had clearly defined rules and obligations surrounding the defence of their people and their land. Their skills in battle were feared by the neighbouring tribes: the Boon Wurrung (to the west); the Taungurong (to the north); the Wurundjeri (to the north and west); the Waveroo (to the north); the Ngarigo (to the north-east); and the Bidawal in far East Gippsland. There were clearly prescribed rules of engagement surrounding combat and this prevented any excessive injury beyond the drawing of blood. Occasionally, however, battles could get fierce enough to result in deaths<sup>4</sup>.

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1 Howitt 1904, p. 88.

2 This paragraph draws on GLaWAC, *Gunaikurnai Whole-of-Country Plan*, p. 10.

3 *Gunaikurnai Whole-of-Country Plan*, p. 10.

4 *Gunaikurnai Whole-of-Country Plan*, p. 10; Deadly Stories: <https://www.deadlystory.com/page/aboriginal-country-map/aboriginal-country/gunaikurnai> (accessed 2 July 2018).

## Co-existence, the mission era and beyond

The intrusion of European settlers into Gippsland marked the beginning of a time of immense upheaval, disruption and displacement for the Gunaikurnai. British colonial rule imposed foreign rules about land tenure and the use of natural resources which was at odds with Gunaikurnai custom and tradition. The rule of the invaders denied the first peoples of the Latrobe Valley the right to practise their culture on their Country as they had done for millennia. Frontier violence, low birthrate, introduced diseases and other health problems caused a significant decline in population that weakened community ties. Some of the Gunaikurnai stayed on their country by taking up work on pastoral stations and as seasonal labourers, and in doing so managed to hold on to some elements of their traditional life. Others moved away, living in camps in the bush or on the fringes of the new emerging settlements, outsiders in their own land<sup>5</sup>.

The pastoral frontier created a divided community of intruders and defenders. Relations between the two groups were generally hostile through the 1840s, but there were cases of good relations between individual settlers and Aboriginal people. An Aboriginal man, known as 'Black Joe', for example, worked for the Campbell family at Traralgon. On his death, the family laid him to rest at the first Traralgon Cemetery, which was located at the railway reserve; other local Aboriginal people were also buried there<sup>6</sup>.

Through the 1850s and up to 1863, there was considerable interaction between settlers and Aboriginal people. The Gunaikurnai also frequently moved around in this period, often travelling to Melbourne and then returning to their country. The Board for the Protection of Aborigines, established by the Victorian Government in 1850, sought to remove Aboriginal people from centres of population and to confine them to designated reserves or mission stations. In 1863, most of the Gunaikurnai in the Latrobe Valley were sent to Ramahyuck near Sale, which was a reserve set aside for a Moravian mission station<sup>7</sup>. The mission was laid out like a small village, with slab huts and a church and school. Here the Gunaikurnai planted vegetable gardens, and were taught farming and domestic work. The

Moravian missionaries adopted a paternalistic attitude; they instructed the Gunaikurnai in Christian doctrine and discouraged them from continuing to practise their own cultural traditions. The Gunaikurnai nevertheless retained some cultural practices. In 1886, in accordance with the stipulations of the so-called 'Half-Caste Act' (*Aborigines' Protection Act*), Aboriginal residents at Ramahyuck who were [over 13 and] under the age of 35 were required to leave the reserve. Those ejected from Ramahyuck were forced to find work and accommodation where they could, and many moved between Sale and the small towns in the Latrobe Valley, including Morwell, Traralgon and Rosedale. The economic downturn across the colony in the early 1890s conspired to make life even more difficult for those Aboriginal people living off the reserves. In 1908, those remaining at Ramahyuck were resettled at the Lake Tyers Aboriginal Reserve.

By the end of the nineteenth century, there were Aboriginal people living in different parts of the Valley, mostly on the outskirts of the main towns or in the bush. Having difficulty in accessing housing, some Aboriginal people lived on the street which placed them at risk of being taken into custody under vagrancy laws. They supplemented traditional food sources with begging. An Aboriginal man who was given the name 'Bobby Brown' was a well-known identity in Traralgon, who used to wander the streets and beg for money<sup>8</sup>. The records of the local court houses provide details of local Aboriginal people being tried for petty theft and other misdemeanours in the early twentieth century.

As was the case at Ramahyuck, the Aboriginal people at Lake Tyers were denied their rights as citizens. They were usually paid in rations rather than money for any work they did; they were not permitted to freely come and go but their movements were strictly supervised. Aboriginal families were subject to the interference of welfare bodies and church groups who believed Aboriginal children would do better away from Lake Tyers and their parents. Many children were removed from their parents from the 1920s and up until the 1970s.

5 Commonwealth of Australia 2000, RFA Gippsland report, p. 9, citing Morgan 1997; Attwood 1986.

6 *Traralgon Record*, 1 May 1914, p. 4; Gippsland Farmers' Journal, 6 December 1889, p. 1. Joe most likely passed away in the 1870s, before the gazettal of the new Traralgon Cemetery in c.1877.

7 This site was outside the clans' traditional country.

8 *Traralgon Record*, 15 February 1901, p. 2.



From the mid-twentieth century, many Aboriginal people left Lake Tyers and moved to Melbourne, especially Fitzroy, and to other towns in search of work. Many settled in the Latrobe Valley where they found work in factories, in abattoirs and seasonal farming work<sup>9</sup>. Despite the high employment rate in the Latrobe Valley, Aboriginal people faced discrimination in applying for work and in obtaining suitable housing. One Aboriginal man claimed in the Morwell local court in the 1950s that he had not been able to get work because he was Aboriginal<sup>10</sup>. The timber industry offered Aboriginal men much sought-after waged labour. At Jackson's Track, near Drouin (north-west of the Latrobe Valley), there was a large Aboriginal camp made up of people who had left Lake Tyers mission and were working in the forest

as timber-cutters<sup>11</sup>. It is likely that there were other smaller, short-lived camps in the forests on Crown land. Richard Broome has noted that out of a total Aboriginal population of 1300 in Victoria in the mid-1950s, 1000 people were 'campers', who were 'free from control but in poor material circumstances'<sup>12</sup>.

Despite the crisis of colonisation and dispossession, the Aboriginal communities of the Latrobe Valley have retained strong cultural connections and have rebuilt strong communities and their connections to Country. The local Aboriginal community, led by Albert Mullett, initiated the introduction of Aboriginal Studies at the Gippsland Institute of Advanced Education in the 1970s.

### Settler communities

The influence of Scottish settlers dominated early pastoral society in Gippsland and the Latrobe Valley. A large proportion of the early pastoral settlers were Highlanders — including the Campbells of Traralgon — who maintained their Gaelic language and cultural traditions such as Caledonian games. In the late nineteenth century, some of the older Scottish settlers in the district 'still had the brogue'<sup>13</sup>. The Scots imposed familiar Scottish names on the land: for example in the naming of 'Caledonia Australis' and in naming the Glengarry River (later renamed the Latrobe River) after the clan of the aristocratic Scots pastoral settler, Lachlan Macalister<sup>14</sup>. The Scots continued to be an influential group in the Traralgon area into the early twentieth century. Also prevalent amongst the early settlers were Northern Irish Protestants (who were Presbyterian like the Scots), the English and the Irish Catholics, the latter prospering as dairy farmers.

Alexander Sutherland's 1888 centenary account of the colony, district by district, records a great number of men who were born in Ireland. The Edmond brothers of County Kerry, Ireland, for example, were prominent local figures as successful farmers and publicans in Morwell<sup>15</sup>.

As colonial settlers tended to do in many parts of Victoria, they drew similarities, often romantic and nostalgic, between their adopted country and the land of their birth. Small towns were typically a mix of Scots, English, Irish and Welsh, and the various cultural groups often identified with the landscape of green rolling hills and rich plains and imagined it to be like 'home'.

Although fewer in number, there was also a Chinese presence in the Latrobe Valley in the late nineteenth century. Chinese market gardeners were established in Traralgon in the early 1900s, with one settler Ah Poo having been granted freehold title to his Traralgon block in 1875<sup>16</sup>.

9 Gunaikurnai Traditional Owner consultation, Morwell, 11 October 2018.

10 *Argus*, 3 November 1956, p. 7.

11 Carolyn Langdon and Daryl Tonkin 2002, *Jackson's Track: Memoir of a dreaming place*.

12 Broome 2005, p. 285.

13 Harry H. Peck 1942, *Memoirs of a Stockman*, Stock and Land Publishing Co., Melbourne, p. 79. See also *Gippsland Farmers' Journal*, 6 December 1889, p. 1.

14 This is discussed in Watson 1984.

15 Sutherland 1888, vol. 2, p. 377.

16 *Morwell Advertiser*, 30 March 1906, p. 2; Barbara Johnson, Traralgon & District Historical Society, pers. com., April 2019.

## Small towns and settlements

A scattering of small towns and settlements appeared in the 1870s and 1880s, encouraged by the improvements in transport through the region by road and rail, as well as due to the increased number of selectors who required service towns. Early settlements were usually dependent on a major road or the railway line, and often emerged at a crossroads or river crossing. The Gippsland railway line, reserved in 1873 and completed in 1879, established a firm foundation for the future growth of Traralgon, Morwell and Moe. Moe developed around the new railway station and overtook the earlier settlement of nearby Westbury. By 1884 it was reported that Moe could justify being accorded the description of being a proper township<sup>17</sup>. Morwell also developed from the 1880s, buoyed by the operations of the Great Morwell Coal Mine. This period saw double-storey banks and shop buildings appear in the main street of Morwell, promising prosperity. Traralgon had developed slightly earlier as a service town for the pastoral industry, and also boasted some fine buildings by the late nineteenth century.

Other smaller towns in the wider district included Moondarra in the 1870s, Narracan in 1874, Trafalgar 1875, Glengarry in the early 1870s (when it was known as Toongabbie South), and Yinnar. Boolarra was not established until 1884, when it was beginning to support a growing timber-cutting industry<sup>18</sup>. Tyers, originally known as Boola Boola, had opened a school by 1879 but a township was not laid out until 1893. These small settlements usually comprised a hotel, a blacksmith, and a few stores grouped at a crossroads or crossing place, which served the growing farming communities in each district. Later, new farming communities were established at Moe Swamp in the 1890s, at the Hazelwood Soldier Settlement estate in 1922<sup>19</sup>, and other areas also became more consolidated with closer settlement. The small communities that developed were self-reliant and worked together, often pooling resources.

Short-lived settlements also grew out of work camps, such as a railway construction camp, a road camp, or a sawmilling camp, and in some cases such a camp formed the origin of a town.

Some examples are the railway camps in the 1870s, the Moe Swamp drainage works in the 1890s, and the coal-mining camp at Coalville. The camp at Brown Coal Mine later developed into the township of Yallourn North. However, such a foundation often lent a somewhat precarious element to settlement. The workers in these camps were predominantly single men who were often transient and not inclined to put down roots; as a consequence, some of the expected standards of town life were absent.

The settlement at Brown Coal Mine developed in the early 1900s as a makeshift camp. It grew quickly in an unplanned and largely unregulated manner to accommodate the needs of the coal miners and labourers working for the Great Morwell Mining Co. mine and, later, the open-cut mine. In around 1920 there were 500 people living there, including families. Tents and buildings were erected, with commercial enterprises appearing. Life was rough, but people were brought together through shared experiences and situation, and a close community developed. There were mixed views about this place, with one journalist declaring 'Altogether it was a primitive place, miserable or charming according to individual temperament or outlook'<sup>20</sup>. Living and working at Brown Coal Mine came with a number of challenges and discomforts, not the least of which was a lack of proper housing. For the immigrant workers at the mine, including Italians and Maltese, and possibly other groups, there was the additional obstacle of having a poor knowledge of English. Tensions ran high in the 1920s at this makeshift and overwhelmingly male settlement, and conflicts erupted, including altercations between the Maltese and the Italians<sup>21</sup>.

With industrial development through the twentieth century, towns were also buoyed by particular local industries — such as timber, gold, dairying, coal or paper manufacturing. Peoples' lives were swayed by greater economic forces; the physical impact of instant townships was enormous.

17 *Traralgon Record*, 15 August 1884, p. 3.

18 'Boolarra', Victorian Places, <http://www.victorianplaces.com.au/boolarra> (accessed 6 June 2018).

19 *Morwell Advertiser*, 2 June 1922, p. 3.

20 *Age*, 24 April 1920, p. 21.

21 *Traralgon Record*, 29 May 1925, p. 4.

## Large town centres

Traralgon, Morwell and Moe were modest agricultural towns in the early twentieth century. The impact of industrial development from the 1920s onwards, however, led to the dramatic expansion of these towns as well the creation of a fourth town — Yallourn.



*Daniel Rutter Long, watercolour painting of Moe, 1883 (State Library Victoria, Accession No. H2003.91/48)*

Yallourn was established as a 'company town' of the SEC. It was unusual in that it was not part of a municipal area, but instead was managed by a group of commissioners. It was planned in 1919 as a model town by A.R. La Gerche, who was influenced by the Garden City movement of the early 1900s<sup>22</sup>. In September 1920 the commissioners selected the route for branch railway line to the coal mine, and also the location of the new town. The Yallourn township needed to be within walking distance from the open-cut mine, power station and briquette factory, as most workers in the 1920s did not own a motor car. The well-designed township was laid out at the same time as Yallourn's industrial infrastructure were established. There would not have been more than 10,000 people living in the Latrobe Valley at that time<sup>23</sup>.

When John Monash officially began work for the SEC in January 1921, the statutory authority had already laid the ground rules and the geographic location for this enterprise. The SEC owned the town, which meant that they made all the decisions that governed the town and its residents. This was an extraordinary power as it meant that a statutory body that behaved much like a private enterprise also had all the functions

of a local municipality. In 1932 the degree of control over the town and workers of Yallourn was said to have been 'the largest and most comprehensive use of State power outside Russia'<sup>24</sup>. The community that was created by the SEC, nonetheless, found ways in which it was able to exert independence when it needed to, and individuals found ways in which they could shape their own lives. Workers took advantage of what was offered: security of employment, reliable and well-managed town services, and pride in being part of a large industrial enterprise. Despite the SEC having a great degree of control over workers' lives, it constructed not only the physical township but a close-knit community with a range of supporting civic and social services.

Alan La Gerche, the chief architect for the SEC, managed a team of architects working on the design of Yallourn. He was assisted by Melbourne architect Arthur Stephenson<sup>25</sup>. Another of his team was William E. Gower, who succeeded La Gerche as chief architect upon La Gerche's retirement in 1938. Gower remained in his new role until 1961, when Yallourn was effectively completed. Apart from the layout for the town, La Gerche, Gower and his team designed several hundred houses that were distinguished in size



*Sketch of Morwell, 1880s, showing timber stacked alongside Morwell railway station (source: Alexander Sutherland 1888, Victoria and its Metropolis, vol. 2)*

and style according to the various ranks of employment within the SEC. There was also an administrative centre, a memorial to John Monash (who died in 1931), an alpine hut, a picture theatre, a hospital, shops and other facilities, three hostels for single men, facilities for children such as a kindergarten, a primary school and an infant welfare centre, as well as a technical school that trained workers apprenticed to the SEC<sup>26</sup>.

<sup>22</sup> Freestone 2010, p. 17.

<sup>23</sup> Census of the Commonwealth of Australia, 4 April 1921, *Census Bulletin No. 3, Population and Dwellings in Local Government Areas*.

<sup>24</sup> F.W. Eggleston, *State Socialism in Victoria*, quoted in John Tomaney and Margaret Somerville 2010, 'Climate change and regional identity in the Latrobe Valley, Victoria', *Australian Humanities Review*, Issue 49, ANU EPress, p. 35.

<sup>25</sup> Freestone 2010, p. 121.

<sup>26</sup> Built Heritage Pty Ltd, 'Dictionary of Unsung Architects: William E. Gower'; 'Yallourn', Victorian Places (<http://www.victorianplaces.com.au/Yallourn>, accessed 13 June 2018).



*Afternoon shopping in Yallourn, late 1940s (source: Three Decades, 1949)*

The town drew great admiration for its overall layout and fine buildings. The Yallourn picture theatre sufficiently impressed the young architect Robin Boyd for him to include it in his first book, *Victorian Modern*, in 1947.

Yallourn was well-designed and well-managed. Its purpose-built houses were predominantly occupied by SEC employees who could afford to pay the high rents and were prepared to sacrifice owning their own home while employed by the SEC. From the 1950s the Yallourn Town Advisory Council was established to give residents a measure of control over the management of the town. The *Victorian Municipal Directory* of 1956 described Yallourn as

*Unique in Australia as the only model town planned and built by a public authority ... Town administration direct responsibility of SEC, assisted by Town Advisory Council [which had an independent Chairman, three residents voted by the community and three nominated by the SEC] empowered [to] make by-laws for town areas on matters normally dealt with by a municipal council and recommend, or advise, State Electricity Commission on matters affecting life, health, welfare and amenities of residents of town area<sup>27</sup>.*

Apart from being unable to purchase your own home and the incessant pollution from the nearby mine and power station, there were other constraints to living in Yallourn. Social life was relatively structured and there was an unnatural skewed demographic, initially at least, with a dominance of young families and relatively few older people. There was also a dearth of single women, as only SEC employees were eligible for houses at Yallourn and they were overwhelmingly male. During the Second World War, Yallourn's local residents were disappointed in the limited

retail prospects of the Yallourn Co-op, which was run by the SEC, but there was no local remedy as the SEC prohibited private businesses from operating. A social survey conducted in the early 1940s found that

*The Yallourn people complain bitterly about the SEC store, saying that the goods are expensive, quality is poor, there is very little choice, and the service is bad, so that they prefer to go to surrounding towns to do their shopping. The traders in these towns subsidise bus services to enable them to do so<sup>28</sup>.*

Whilst the town boasted an impressive theatre, there was a limit to leisure activities. There was no hotel in Yallourn until 1928, and up until then 'sly glog' was an ongoing problem for the authorities. When the new £30,000 Yallourn Hotel finally opened in October 1928, it was reported that 170 eager patrons rushed the premises<sup>29</sup>.



*Hostel corner Railway Avenue and Eastern Road in the 1940s (source: Digging People Up for Coal, 2002)*

As the SEC's operations in the Latrobe Valley continued to expand in the 1940s and 1950s, the main town centres grew exponentially. By the mid-1950s, Moe had around 2000 homes and a population of 8000 people<sup>30</sup>. Traralgon was also experiencing growth on account of the nearby Maryvale mill, and its expanding operations, as it employed many people. Newborough also grew considerably.

By the 1950s, the four main towns of the Valley were operating as large urban centres. They were each part of different local government areas: initially as part of the Shires of Rosedale, Traralgon, Morwell and Narracan. Moe was excised from Narracan Shire to become a Borough in 1955, and a City in 1963. The Borough of Traralgon was excised from the Shire of Traralgon in 1961, and was elevated to the City of Traralgon in 1964. Morwell remained a Shire until 1990 when it was later renamed the City of Morwell.

27 'Yallourn', *Victorian Municipal Directory*, 1956.

28 McIntyre and McIntyre 1944, p. 94.

29 Dingle 1984, p. 216; *Herald*, 2 October 1928, p. 21.

30 *Under Southern Skies*, [1955], p. 43.



Although independent, the major towns were well connected, with 'excellent bus services [that] radiate from Yallourn to Moe, Morwell and Traralgon'<sup>31</sup>. Many workers commuted between the main towns on a daily basis. Latrobe Valley Bus Lines was the largest regional bus service in Victoria in the postwar period. The available shops at Moe were adequate, with Purvis stores playing an important role, but the population was growing at such a fast rate that it did not keep up with demand and some Moe residents preferred shopping at the larger centre of Morwell<sup>32</sup>. At Morwell too, the new housing developments brought in large populations that were initially disadvantaged in terms of shopping. At the new housing estate at Morwell East, the Morwell Shire Council urged the Housing Commission of Victoria to build more shops; in 1952 the estate had only three shops for a population of 3200<sup>33</sup>. With population growth, the number and variety of shops increased through the 1950s and 1960s. New immigrants from Europe opened delicatessens selling 'continental' produce.

Yallourn flourished for several decades before being dismantled by the SEC, a process that

began in 1975. By the mid-1980s the entire town had been demolished and its buildings moved to adjacent towns, ahead of works to extend the existing open-cut mine. There was a difficult adjustment for residents for the town had been so carefully planned, was greatly admired by visitors and, most importantly, had been a cherished home to several generations of SEC workers. David Langmore wrote in 2013 that 'it is the largest town to have ever been destroyed in the whole of Australia's history'<sup>34</sup>. Yet its dismantling had been inevitable. In 1947, a report commissioned by the SEC, titled 'Latrobe Valley Development: interim regional survey and report' by Frank Heath and W.E. Gower, suggested 'rather quietly' that 'the coal upon which the town is built may eventually be required'. Fourteen years later, General Superintendent John Field wrote to the Yallourn Trades and Labour Council saying that 'it seems likely that the coal under Yallourn must be won after the year 1995... the potential value to the State and the commission far exceeds any value possessed by the town property'<sup>35</sup>.



*Busy bus terminal, Commercial Road, Morwell, 1950s (source: Under Southern Skies, [1955])*



*Busy shopping strip in Commercial Road, Morwell, 1970s (source: Jocelyn Burt 1975, Gippsland)*

31 *Under Southern Skies*, [1955], p. 43.

32 Lorraine Proctor, 'Moe in 1950: Growing pains and civic affairs', *Gippsland Heritage Journal*, no. 21, 1997.

33 *Age*, 29 March 1952, p. 18.

34 Langmore 2013, p. 168.

35 Quoted in Langmore 2013, p. 157.

## Housing

The first homesteads erected by selectors in the 1870s and 1880s often were a slab construction built using felled timber from the selector's block. Farmers improved their homes as means afforded, but the typical house was timber, functional and unpretentious. The housing in small townships tended to be modest timber cottages; the large brickworks at Traralgon supplied bricks for the more substantial and better quality homes.

An array of ad hoc rudimentary housing was provided in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries at a number of workers' camps, including railway navies, timber workers, gold-miners and coal workers. A rough settlement of huts and tents was established at Brown Coal Mine, near Morwell, from 1916. Once the SEC had established its Yallourn operations, more miners and others, who preferred not to live in the SEC-provided houses, moved to Brown Coal Mine and Haunted Hills, where they set up basic accommodation. Although initially designed as impermanent housing, some of these shacks were used as family homes for several years.



*'Part of a better class residential zone in Morwell', c1940s (source: McIntyre and McIntyre 1944, Country Towns of Victoria)*

Rather than the dominance of single men that characterised Brown Coal Mine, the government town of Yallourn attracted married men and provided houses suitable for families. The SEC made efforts to encourage married men as it was thought they added a desired stability to community life. At Yallourn, housing was of a high quality and architect-designed but could only be occupied under a rental agreement. SEC workers who preferred to own their own homes elected instead to live at Morwell and commute to Yallourn each day.



*Workers' housing provided by SEC (source: Three Decades, 1949).*

The ever-expanding operations of the SEC in the Latrobe Valley through the middle decades of the twentieth century meant an ongoing demand for labour, which led to a substantial population growth. The SEC provided permanent housing on a large scale at the main urban centres of Yallourn and Morwell. A large number of new homes were constructed in Moe and Morwell for the SEC in the 1950s under an arrangement with the Housing Commission of Victoria<sup>36</sup>.

The opening of APM's Maryvale Mill, which grew rapidly through the war years and developed into a large enterprise employing many hundreds of people, also triggered a strong demand for workers' housing and APM built houses at Traralgon and Morwell for its employees. The rapid growth of APM, however, meant that it could not keep up with housing demand. In some cases, emergency housing was erected using Nissen huts that were in surplus after the Second World War<sup>37</sup>. Unlike many SEC workers, the APM workers were given the opportunity to purchase their own homes.

Housing development continued through the 1950s at Moe, Morwell and Newborough at an extraordinarily rapid rate. Moe celebrated the completion of its 1000th Housing Commission house in 1952, becoming the first place in Australia to attain this distinction<sup>38</sup>. Much of the public housing, built for SEC workers, was designed by the Housing Commission of Victoria, and was criticised as being 'low-cost housing estates'. They were in sharp contrast to the better quality brick homes that had been built at Yallourn in the 1920s and 1930s<sup>39</sup>. The designs were somewhat drab and uninspired, but they were functional and quick and easy to erect. The uniformity of such large numbers of these houses

<sup>36</sup> Renate Howe 1988, *New Houses for Old*, p. 73.

<sup>37</sup> Graham Goulding 2016, *Settlement to City*, Moe and District Historical Society, Moe, p. 30.

<sup>38</sup> *Dandenong Journal*, 2 July 1952, p. 9.

<sup>39</sup> White 1968, p. 142; Lorraine Proctor, 'Moe in 1950: Growing pains and civic affairs', *Gippsland Heritage Journal*, no. 21, 1997.

created a formulaic suburban architecture that was not dissimilar to what Robin Boyd in 1960 termed 'the Australian Ugliness'. Henri Licht recalls that the only distinguishing feature of these uniform, monotonous houses was the colours they were painted<sup>40</sup>.

Many of the new housing estates for some years appeared rough and unfinished, with unmade streets lined with uniform single-storey timber housing. Asbestos was also used extensively (for example, in Alamein Street, Morwell East). Asbestos was a popular economical building material at the time and was commonly used in public housing across the Latrobe Valley. It was a key component in a 1947 model house that was designed by the architectural branch of the SEC and provided to hundreds of their employees<sup>41</sup>.

Often in the new housing estates there was inadequate provision for the associated necessities of a residential area, such as a sufficient number of shops and suitable areas for children to play. In 1954 at a new housing estate in Morwell East, there was an extraordinary figure of between 500 and 600 children who attended the Tobruk Street State School and who had no outdoor playing area except the local school ground<sup>42</sup>. A distinctive estate was 'White City' at Morwell, which was established in the early 1950s as basic, temporary housing for married couples and young families; it was so-named because all the houses were painted white<sup>43</sup>.

The new service town of Churchill, near Morwell, was built in the mid-1960s by the Housing Commission of Victoria and the Shire of Morwell<sup>44</sup>. It was designed as a workers' town but the houses

were privately owned rather than owned by the SEC. The Housing Commission built rental homes in some of the estates in Churchill with land in other estates being available for purchase and to build private homes<sup>45</sup>. Further housing was provided at Traralgon in the mid-1980s where the SEC had acquired land for staff housing as part of the development of Loy Yang power station<sup>46</sup>.

The large-scale public housing areas in the Latrobe Valley were built at a time of peak prosperity, full employment and industrial growth. With economic decline in the 1990s and subsequent unemployment, thousands of people left the Valley and much of the public housing was left unoccupied. At Moe, the Housing Commission houses were used to provide much needed public housing to people from outside the Valley. In the 1990s an area of Moe became known as 'the Bronx' due to its disadvantaged community<sup>47</sup>. Unemployment and depressed conditions also saw cases of poverty at Churchill and Morwell.

Debate over the provision of housing for Aboriginal people who had left the Lake Tyers mission became a major local issue in the 1960s. As part of its push for 'assimilation' of Aboriginal people into mainstream society, the State government proposed in the mid-1960s for the Lake Tyers Aboriginal reserve to be closed and its occupants resettled. For Aboriginal people, this was another case of being denied a voice about their own future. The residents of Lake Tyers included Gunaikurnai people as well as Aboriginal people from other parts of Victoria, and people with mixed backgrounds.



*Pre-fabricated housing at Newborough, c.1950s (source: A walk through Gippsland history)*

40 Henri Licht 2015, *By the Scruff of the Neck*, self-published (no page numbers).

41 *Age*, 31 July 1947, p. 3.

42 *Morwell Advertiser*, 16 December 1954, p. 2.

43 Leo Billington, notes provided to Review Committee, December 2018.

44 White 1968, p. 142; see also Howe 1988.

45 Elaine Andrijczak, pers. com., April 2019.

46 Parish of Maryvale, parish plan, PROV.

47 *National Library of Australia Bulletin*, 1999.





*Yallourn street view in Autumn, c1950s (source: Goulding 2015, A Walk Through Gippsland History)*

In 1965, the Aborigines Welfare Board, which was largely made up of representatives from various Protestant churches, proposed to establish an Aboriginal housing facility on the fringes of Morwell to serve as a 'training camp'. Here, they planned to build a large number of houses on a 4.5-acre site set aside for Aboriginal people who were to be relocated from Lake Tyers. This plan was strongly opposed by the Morwell Shire Council and the local community. Instead, shortly after, the Government proposed to build six new homes in Morwell for Aboriginal families<sup>48</sup>. The Aborigines Welfare Board resettled other Aboriginal families in Traralgon in 1964 and two years later those families also faced local opposition. There were plans for an 'all-Aborigine congress' to be held at Morwell Town Hall on 6 March 1966<sup>49</sup>.

Yorta Yorta man Doug Nicholls of the Aborigines Advancement League was a regular visitor to the Latrobe Valley in the 1950s where he campaigned for citizens' rights for Aboriginal people and advocated for the Lake Tyers Aboriginal community to be granted independence to manage their own land. From the 1960s, the Lake Tyers Aboriginal community lobbied strongly for the right to live on and manage the reserve and in 1971, they finally won this campaign. In Morwell, an Aboriginal Housing Co-op was established in the c.1970s, which was a community-run program to assist Aboriginal people accessing housing in town.

48 Report of the Aborigines Welfare Board, 1966.

49 Age, 25 January 1966, p. 7.



## Town and community life

From the late-nineteenth century, as towns and settlements grew, local communities began to establish a range of social events and organisations. Race days and agricultural show days were important local events. A variety of clubs and interest groups were established. Hotels were a centre of social life, as were the various churches, which organised dances and other social functions. Creating a 'community' at Yallourn relied on people sharing their working life and their social life, and sharing a common goal to build a place for the future. People worked hard to build new social groups and sports clubs that had been long established in the neighbouring towns.

There was little class distinction in Moe and Morwell, apart from the broad categories of labourers, shopkeepers and professionals. At Yallourn there was a strong body of white-collar workers (SEC managers and office workers) and a smaller proportion of tradesmen and labourers<sup>50</sup>. Across the Valley, there were few wealthy, established farmers as the majority of people on the land occupied modest selections or soldier settlement blocks. Traralgon had a slightly different composition as it had some early established farming families.

From the 1940s to the 1960s the towns of Moe and Morwell, and later Newborough and Churchill, developed as predominantly workers' towns. This social structure eclipsed the existing, more balanced social structure, and skewed the demographic. Later, in the 1990s, when privatisation caused economic decline and population drift away from the Valley, there was little need for the superfluous public housing.

Local newspapers provided communities with local information and a sense of connection and helped to establish local identity. These included the *Morwell Advocate* and the *Boolarra and Mirboo Chronicle* from 1886, the *Moe Register* and the *Narracan Shire Advocate* from 1888, and the *Trafalgar and Yarragon Times* from 1902. There were a number of local newspapers operating across the Valley until 1967 when they were eventually effectively absorbed into the *Latrobe Valley Advocate and Advertiser*, later the *Latrobe Valley Express*. *Live Wire* was a weekly newspaper published for Yallourn by the SEC from 1925 to 1957, while *Contact* was a SEC magazine for the entire Latrobe Valley region during the 1970s. These papers were local institutions, often with a strong local focus on the towns they served.

The nineteenth-century institution of the public library and meeting room — the mechanics' institute, free library and hall — became a standard feature of Victorian towns and this was no less the case in the Latrobe Valley. Mechanics' Institutes offered libraries and newspapers, film and lecture nights, and public meeting places. Public halls were central to community life in the Latrobe Valley. They were a focal point for social life in rural communities and were often situated adjacent to a local sporting facility. Mechanics' institutes were established at Traralgon (1878), Toongabbie (1883), Morwell (1884), Moe (1885), Glengarry (by 1890), Narracan (1878), Trafalgar (by 1881), and others in Walhalla, Tyers and Jumbuk<sup>51</sup>. Some of these buildings no longer exist, such as the hall at Morwell, which burnt down in 1935, and the hall at Moe, which was replaced with a new public library. The Narracan Mechanics' Institute was relocated to Old Gippsland Heritage Park in Moe along with its library collection<sup>52</sup>. Others have found a new purpose in life.

The Toongabbie Mechanics' Institute and Free Library, built in 1883, holds much of the Latrobe Valley story in its own history. The opening was celebrated with a concert and ball, the music provided by the Alpine Band from Walhalla, and a sports event was held the following day<sup>53</sup>. It was at the Toongabbie Mechanics' Institute that the public meeting was held to consider severing Toongabbie from Rosedale Shire and annexing it to the newly formed Traralgon Shire<sup>54</sup>. Built from local red gum timbers milled in the surrounding forests, a second storey was added in 1891 because Toongabbie had grown in importance as a town on the route to the goldfields in Walhalla, as well as being on the road to Port Albert and the markets of Melbourne. Dairy farms around Toongabbie were also prolific. One of the trustees of the new mechanics' institute was former miner and Walhalla storekeeper, W.H. Goodwin, who moved to Toongabbie in 1877 and established a sawmill and a dairy factory. The 1903 *Australian Handbook* described Toongabbie as having daily coach communication with Walhalla and a population of about 700 people with a couple of churches, a state school, a branch of the Bank of Australasia, an Oddfellow's Lodge, stores, a butter factory, and a mechanics' institute with a library of 764 volumes with a Court of Petty Sessions in its hall<sup>55</sup>. As gold petered out in Walhalla after the turn of the century, fewer people had the need to travel through Toongabbie. The town dwindled

50 Community consultation, Moe, 17 May 2018.

51 Pam Baragwanath 2015.

52 Pam Baragwanath 2015, *These Walls Speak Volumes*. Morwell Historical Society website 'Buildings'.

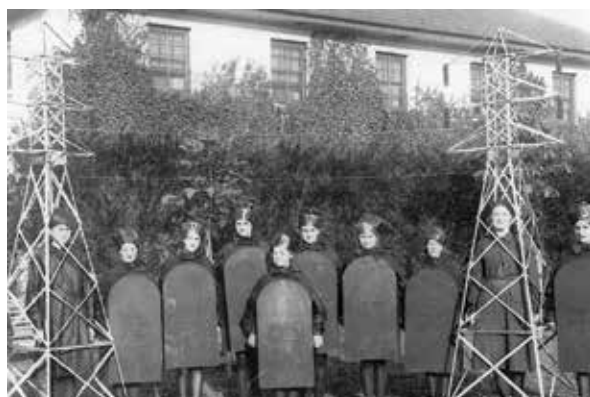
53 *Toongabbie Advertiser*, 14 December 1883, p. 2; *Gippsland Times*, 4 January 1884, p. 3.

54 *Gippsland Times*, 18 August 1886, p. 3.

55 Cited in Victorian Places website: 'Toongabbie'.

and, by 1933, the population had fallen to 276<sup>56</sup>. Years later, a new community centre replaced the function of the mechanics' institute, which had deteriorated considerably. In 1981 a town meeting was held to consider the building and vote on its future; it was saved by a single vote. Over the following years the building has been recognised for its unusual architectural form and the importance of its role in the history of Toongabbie and the Latrobe Valley<sup>57</sup>. With further support and community fund-raising, the building was repaired and restored, and re-opened in 1995<sup>58</sup>.

Public halls continued to be important though the twentieth century. Halls were often the meeting places for local groups, such as Boy Scouts and Girl Guides, the Country Women's Association (CWA) and various local committees. They continued to be a popular local venue for social events and family functions, and they were also used for public meetings and polling booths at election time. There has been a high level of community involvement in service clubs and community groups in the Latrobe Valley, including Boy Scouts and Girl Guides, Red Cross and Rotary.



*Girl Guides at Yallourn dressed up as briquettes and pylons (complete with transmission wires), c.1930s [source: Fletcher 2002, Digging People Up for Coal]*

Commemorating wartime service has been another galvanizing force for local communities. The region had also recruited a relatively large number of men for the Boer War; being a closely settled farming area the young men were sought after as capable riders and good marksmen. After the First World War, most towns erected public memorials to their lost youth, with the exception of the newly created township of Yallourn. Some places erected a memorial hall, for example on the Hazelwood Estate, where a memorial hall was built and officially opened in 1926<sup>59</sup>. The importance held for ex-servicemen and the commemoration of Anzac was perhaps greater due to the Valley's close association with that towering wartime figure, Sir John Monash, who was the architect of the SEC's operations in the Latrobe Valley. For many returned men, the acknowledgement of Anzac Day was an important annual event in their communities.

In the 1950s and 1960s, balls and dances in towns and rural communities were a great social occasion with a great supper always anticipated. Commercial entertainment venues were important to social life. Picture theatres became popular with a cinema in all the major towns. The Morwell picture theatre opened in 1958 by Rex Hamilton, who also ran the Yallourn Picture Theatre and the Yallourn Guest House<sup>60</sup>. At Moe the Civic Theatre was popular, as was the drive-in.

There is also a strong history of visual and performing arts, and other cultural groups in the Latrobe Valley. The Morwell Players were formed in 1947 and for thirty-eight years were a very successful amateur drama group who won many prestigious awards including the BHP and Moomba Award and the Bruce Carroll Memorial Plaque for the best one-act play. The Latrobe Valley Eisteddfod Performing Arts Festival has been held in Traralgon annually since 1955 in August and September. The Latrobe Regional Gallery and the Latrobe Performing Arts Centre are venues which have hosted national exhibitions and performances.

56 *Australian Census, 1933.*

57 Mechanics' Institute and Free Library, Toongabbie, Statement of Significance, updated 21 November 1996.

58 'Toongabbie Mechanics' Institute and Free Library': <http://www.toongabbie.vic.au/history/toongabbie-mechanics-institute/> (accessed 10 July 2018); Michelle Slater, *Latrobe Valley Express*, 'Solar to power public halls', 12 July 2018 (accessed 18 July 2018).

59 *Morwell Advertiser*, 8 October 1926, p. 2.

60 Village Twin, Morwell: <http://www.thecinemasproject.com.au/cinema/village-twin/>

## The importance of education

As farming settlements emerged across the Latrobe Valley in the 1870s and 1880s, in the wake of the new railway line and improved transport, communities came together to lobby the Victorian government for a local school. Many rural schools appeared across the Valley during this period. Known as 'State schools' and erected under the new *Education Act* of 1872, the majority were small, single-roomed timber buildings. By 1880 there were state schools at Moe, Morwell, Boola Boola (Tyers), Hazelwood North, Trafalgar and Yarragon<sup>61</sup>. The government also established a higher elementary school at Traralgon in 1915, which brought a significant educational advantage to the region. A rush of workers to the coal mine north of Morwell on the Latrobe River in 1916 saw the opening of a makeshift Brown Coal Mine State School that year. Further population growth in the 1920s, following the beginning of the SEC's operations in the district, saw new state schools opened at Yallourn and Morwell<sup>62</sup>.

An important element of education through the industrial period was the provision of technical education. The Yallourn Technical High School was opened in 1928 (for boys only). The school not only served Yallourn but took male students from Morwell, Moe, Trafalgar and Traralgon<sup>63</sup>. The subjects taught included carpentry, electrical engineering, welding and plumbing, and classes operated in conjunction with the apprenticeship program run by the SEC.

The great influx of people to the Valley in the 1940s, in response to growing employment numbers at the Maryvale mill and the expansion of the SEC's activities, placed additional demands on existing schools and resulted in some schools being over-crowded. At Morwell in 1944, for example, one primary school had 60 students to one teacher<sup>64</sup>. The boost to population at Traralgon necessitated extensions to the state school and the higher elementary

school. A number of new schools were needed owing to the increased population in the postwar period, including additional state schools at Moe and Traralgon. The Yallourn Technical School was extended in the 1940s and a new technical school was opened at Newborough in 1957. The first government high school in the Latrobe Valley opened at Yallourn in 1945; up until then students had to go to Sale or Warragul or further afield to attain a secondary education. Over the following decade government high schools were opened at Traralgon (1951), Moe (1953), Morwell (1956) and Maryvale (1966).

Catholic schools were also expanded in the 1950s, partly because a large proportion of postwar immigrants to the Latrobe Valley were Catholic. An imposing double-storey Catholic primary school, St Kieran's, was built in Moe in 1949. This was run by the Presentation Sisters, who had established a small convent nearby, and who also opened Presentation College at Moe in 1955. At Traralgon in 1956, the Marist Brothers opened St Paul's College, a Catholic secondary school for boys. Two years later, the Irish order of Brigidine sisters established Kildare College at Traralgon, to provide secondary education for girls. The Sisters of St Joseph were accommodated at a convent in Morwell and taught at the local Catholic primary school.

With the demise of Yallourn and its valued technical school, a new educational facility, the Gippsland Institute of Advanced Education (GIAE), was opened at Newborough in 1968 and this moved to Churchill in 1972. In 1990 GIAE was taken over by Monash University, which established the Centre for Gippsland Studies where it developed a local history program. The Churchill campus is now part of Federation University Australia.

61 Report of Public Instruction, 1880.

62 Les Blake (ed.) 1973, *Vision and Realisation*.

63 McIntyre and McIntyre 1944, p. 148.

64 McIntyre and McIntyre 1944, p. 145.



*Yallourn Technical School, 1947 (source: State Library Victoria, Accession No. H2009.92/50)*



## Sport, recreation and holidays

For small farming communities in the late nineteenth century, sports meetings were an important element of community life, both as valued social events and as a means of expressing local identity and loyalty. Cricket, football and horse-racing were popular and well attended in most towns in the Valley. They required little by way of facilities, although properly laid out racing tracks and cricket pitches were used whenever the means allowed it. Laying the cricket pitch at the picturesque Yallourn oval in the 1920s was a significant development in the early community life of the town.

Sporting teams from across the district competed regularly with one another — playing cricket in summer and Australian Rules Football in winter. At Brown Coal Mine, the 'Coalies' football team proved a strong side, and there was a degree of rivalry when they played the other local teams of Morwell and Moe. The Yallourn Blacks were another local football team. In the 1960s, the East Morwell Football Club recruited a large number of local Aboriginal footballers, some of whom were scouted by the Victorian Football League clubs, but Aboriginal players often disliked leaving the Valley to play in Melbourne<sup>65</sup>.

Numerous sporting activities and recreational pursuits became available in the Latrobe Valley from the 1950s. These were also important in giving children an outlet for physical activity and a social connection. Popular sports included football, netball, basketball, tennis, swimming, and Little Athletics. Badminton was popular in rural communities as it could be played in local halls. In towns, lawn bowling, croquet and community bands were popular. In the postwar period, soccer also became popular. The Morwell Falcons Soccer Club (later Gippsland Falcons) achieved great success, becoming the Victorian Premier League Champions in 1984 and 1989. Don Di Fabrizio was president of the Morwell Falcons Soccer Club from 1969 to 1994 and instrumental to the success of the Club. The Traralgon Tennis Association Complex has been host to the International Tennis Federation's Junior International Tournament in January for twenty-five years with support from Tennis Australia, the State government and Latrobe City Council.

The Latrobe Valley was well positioned for holiday destinations, being conveniently located "an hour to the beach, an hour to the snow"<sup>66</sup>. The Latrobe Valley was close to a range of varied attractions, including the Tarra Valley, Walhalla and Mount St Gwinear, while Inverloch and Seaspray were favoured summer holiday destinations. While Walhalla had been dismissed by one tourist guidebook in 1968 as a 'gold-mining ghost town of little interest'<sup>67</sup>, it had by the 1970s emerged as a popular tourist destination. The hills and valleys drew bushwalkers during summer and downhill skiers in winter, and this provided a steady tourist trade for Moe.

Yallourn itself was also a popular tourist destination; it was not only promoted as a celebrated 'garden city' but was a place where visitors could view the open-cut coal mines and power stations. Tours of the power stations were offered to interested visitors from the 1930s; in the 1960s there were daily tours of the open-cut, the power station and the briquette works at Yallourn<sup>68</sup>. Public viewing areas were also provided. Industry also created recreational opportunities. At Hazelwood power station the warm waters of the pondage were made available for public recreational use, including fishing, boating, water-skiing and all-abilities sailing. Since 1992, another attraction has been the impressive Morwell Centenary Rose Garden, which comprises two hectares of gardens and over 3500 roses. In 2009 the gardens were presented with an Award of Garden Excellence by the World Federation of Rose Societies<sup>69</sup>.



*Popular lookout over the Latrobe Valley, with directional compass (source: Edwards 1969, Brown Power)*

65 Gunaikurnai Traditional Owner consultation, Morwell, 11 October 2018.

66 Community consultation, Moe, 17 May 2018.

67 Osmar White 1968, *Guide to Australia*, p. 143.

68 White 1968, p. 143.

69 Morwell Rose Garden: <https://www.morwellrosegarden.com.au/>



*People swimming at the Latrobe River, c1920-1930 (source: J.P. Campbell Collection, State Library Victoria, Accession No. H2009.18/427)*

## Women's social networks

Women were the mainstay of community life. They supported one another and the wider community in difficult times, providing practical help. Women carried out significant community work as members of church guilds, the Red Cross, and the CWA, of which there were active branches at Traralgon, Morwell and Yinnar in the 1940s and 1950s.

The 'Dear Miranda' column in the Victorian country newspaper, the *Weekly Times*, provided an important connection and forum for its women readers from the 1930s through to the 1950s. On 5 September 1931, the *Weekly Times*, Australia's largest rural newspaper at the time, launched a new section called 'The Women's Bureau. Exchange of ideas and recipes'. Conducted by 'Miranda', it invited women to write in their lives, experiences and issues, as well as to share recipes. By 1940 the paper had published over 4300 letters from women all over the country<sup>70</sup>. Many Gippsland women relished reading the new column and many wrote letters to 'Miranda'. It was the social media of its time and 'Forgotten Man' wrote 'via Traralgon' to say jokingly that his dinner was always late because of his wife's and daughter's obsession with the 'Dear Miranda' column<sup>71</sup>. The column reflects the many ways that people experienced, made sense of, shared and coped with their lives.

Mrs Power, of Callignee North, wrote in 1935 to let readers know her family 'have a 3-roomed cottage and would let to anyone genuinely in need of a home. They could keep poultry and grow vegetables and there is rabbit trapping about. It is situated 10 miles out of Traralgon'<sup>72</sup>. This offer would have been welcomed a year later for 'Opalong' who wrote to say 'we may be going to Traralgon soon. We are house hunting at present. There is only one empty house in the town and it is too dear. House hunting in the country is worse than town and town is bad enough'<sup>73</sup>. 'Heather Rose' was living on a farm with her family nearly ten miles from the nearest shopping centre and made all her own clothes. She wrote that their farm was 'at the foot of the Jeeralang Hills and there is a beautiful view from our house — the flats and the farmers harvesting. We can see Yallourn, Morwell and Traralgon from our hill'<sup>74</sup>. The 'Dear Miranda' column, which continues today as a *Weekly Times* feature, is replicated in many ways across the Valley and over time as communities have exerted their own efforts to shape their lives.



Children of the Schier family, Traralgon, 1896 (source: Museum Victoria)

<sup>70</sup> *Weekly Times*, 28 February 1951, p. 44.

<sup>71</sup> *Weekly Times*, 7 May 1938, p. 31.

<sup>72</sup> *Weekly Times*, 16 November 1935, p. 22.

<sup>73</sup> *Weekly Times*, 7 November 1936, p. 50.

<sup>74</sup> *Weekly Times*, 28 February 1951, p. 44.

## Church communities

The churches were primarily religious buildings and places of worship, but also served as important social places. In many early towns the churches were amongst the first to organise social gatherings. They brought people together and ran a range of social activities, fund-raising events and other functions, in addition to the family events of christenings and marriages. The annual Catholic balls throughout the district were much anticipated events and these took place in a number of towns, including Traralgon and Morwell, as well as smaller places like Yinnar and Boolarra.

At Yallourn there were Anglican and Presbyterian churches established by 1923. A site for a Catholic church had been reserved but a church wasn't built until 1927. It was noted that the sparseness of the Catholic population at Yallourn up until that time did not warrant the erection of a church and convent<sup>75</sup>. The small number of Irish Catholics in Yallourn in the 1920s may have had something to do with the strong sectarian mood of the early 1920s; possibly some of the Irish preferred to live at Brown Coal Mine.

In the 1950s the churches welcomed new immigrants to the Latrobe Valley. The Catholic churches, in particular, saw an influx of new parishioners from Italy and Malta. Other churches were adapted for the needs of the newer groups — for example a Greek Orthodox church was established in Morwell.



*The new Traralgon Presbyterian Church, built in 1914 (source: State Library Victoria, Accession No. H32492/3764)*



*The imposing form of St Kieran's Catholic church-school in Moe, erected in 1949 (source: State Library Victoria, Accession No. H2008.12/30)*

<sup>75</sup> *Advocate*, 28 February 1929, p. 26.



## Health and hospitals

Before the advent of large-scale industrial development in the Latrobe Valley, health services were limited. There were usually midwives available in most small towns, and doctors were not plentiful and often travelled considerable distances to see patients. From the early twentieth century there was a handful of small privately run hospitals, for example in Traralgon<sup>76</sup>.

The industrial transformation of the Latrobe Valley from the 1920s was accompanied by the provision of health services, including a modern hospital at Yallourn which was opened in 1929. The Victorian Government knew from recent experience at the Wonthaggi State Coal Mine that there would be pressure to provide a properly equipped public hospital at Yallourn, where the risk of workplace injuries was expected to be high. The lack of a local public hospital would mean that patients would need to be transported elsewhere — to Warragul, Sale or Melbourne.

The coal works at Yallourn had their fair share of accidents as well as a few fatalities, including the death of a man crushed by a tree near Brown Coal Mine, but fatalities were not on the scale of the mining accidents at Wonthaggi. Sawmillers and other timber workers in the Latrobe Valley also suffered a high rate of injury and benefitted from improved medical services. There were mishaps with axes and saws, and men were often crushed by falling timber. With mechanisation at many sawmills in the mid-twentieth century there were ghastly injuries, including the near loss of limbs, and fingers and toes.

The provision of health services in the Latrobe Valley came under pressure with the great increase in local population from the 1930s to the 1950s. The small surrounding farming settlements relied on hospital services in Warragul and Sale, and on local doctors. At Trafalgar there was a small branch hospital of the larger Warragul

hospital<sup>77</sup>. The first private hospital at Moe was established in 1922, which was converted to the Moe Bush Nursing Hospital in 1933<sup>78</sup>. A new hospital was also opened at Morwell in the 1940s. There were also several private hospitals operating in the Valley in the 1930s and 1940s, and this period also saw the provision of infant welfare centres to assist new mothers. In 1952, the Moe Bush Nursing Hospital became part of the Yallourn Hospital.



*Sr Thorpe with twin boys, born at the Moe Bush Nursing Hospital in 1937 (source: Moe & District Historical Society)*

A new public hospital at Traralgon, planned from the late 1940s, was officially opened in 1956, replacing an earlier hospital<sup>79</sup>. Initially known as the Gippsland Base Hospital, it was renamed the Central Gippsland Hospital in 1966. The Latrobe Valley Community Hospital was built in Moe in 1972. The Latrobe Regional Hospital came into existence in July 1991, bringing together the Latrobe Valley Hospital at Moe, the Central

<sup>76</sup> See Cuthill 1970, chapter 7.

<sup>77</sup> McIntyre and McIntyre 1944, p. 132.

<sup>78</sup> *Argus*, 30 October 1933, p. 3.

<sup>79</sup> *Under Southern Skies*, [1955].

Gippsland Hospital at Traralgon and St Hilary's Nursing Home at Morwell<sup>80</sup>. The Latrobe Regional Hospital was privatised in the mid-1990s, but was subsequently re-acquired by the Victorian Government.

The high incidence of mesothelioma, asbestos-related lung cancers and other asbestos-related diseases in the Latrobe Valley emerged in the 1980s as a major health crisis. Mesothelioma is a fatal disease and can take between 30 and 50 years after exposure to asbestos to develop. The Latrobe Valley community, and SEC and other power station workers have the second highest lifetime risk of developing mesothelioma in Australia<sup>81</sup>. Asbestos-related disease stemmed from the heavy use of asbestos, a toxic building material, in the construction of power station and industrial infrastructure in the Latrobe Valley from the 1920s to the 1970s, and also in the extensive housing developments of the 1940s and 1950s, where homes were thrown up quickly using cheap materials. Asbestos had insulating qualities, corrosion resistant properties, and was malleable, which made it easy to use for a range of common building materials used in housing, such as cement sheets and roofing<sup>82</sup>.

The SEC was warned about the dangers of asbestos exposure from the 1940s when it was added to the *Harmful Gases, Vapours, Fumes, Mists, Smokes and Dusts Regulations*<sup>83</sup>. Although this listing obliged employers to restrict exposure to asbestos dust, residents of the Latrobe Valley who worked at Yallourn in the 1950s and 1960s remembered that the amount of dust in the air was so great that 'you could walk into [Yallourn] A station and you couldn't see the end of the boilers'<sup>84</sup>. A report in 2004 found that former workers recalled 'a lot of asbestos dust around' and that 'During their daily work they would be cutting through asbestos to make repairs, or dust would be released into the air from the insulation around the turbines and boilers'. Some workers recalled '[the] "clouds" of dust obscuring their vision, of wiping the film off their coffee cups and throwing "snowballs" of asbestos at each other'<sup>85</sup>.

In 1937, Dr Douglas Shiels established the Industrial Hygiene Division of the Victorian Department of Health and was appointed director. He visited the Latrobe Valley in 1944 and reported on the presence of asbestos dust throughout the power stations and SEC town. He lobbied for better protective equipment and procedures for workers for the duration of his tenure, which he completed in 1956, but his advice about safety equipment conditions was largely ignored<sup>86</sup>. Following Dr Shiels' visit, a superintendent reported to head office 'that workers preferred to use mutton cloth to protect themselves from dust rather than the devices Shiels recommended' and that it was up to workers themselves to arrange the recommended regular medical examinations for respiratory problems<sup>87</sup>. By the 1960s, health warnings were issued from a local doctor at Yallourn. Dr Geoffrey Danger, despite his ominous name, was concerned about the rise in numbers of patients he was seeing with specific asbestos-related illnesses. He began reporting specific cases to the SEC authorities to direct their attention towards the health of their workers<sup>88</sup>. Residents today still remember Dr Danger and the story of him being told to not write the word 'asbestos' on any more medical or death certificates<sup>89</sup>. The importance of asbestos to SEC operations because of its qualities, availability and malleability was significant enough for the authorities to suspend their opposition to its use. By the 1970s, a research report has found, workers were conscious of the responsibilities of the SEC and some were concerned about the asbestos-related health risks of working at the power stations. However, they were grateful to be employed and trusted in the integrity of supervisors to warn them and protect them from identified risks<sup>90</sup>.

By the early 1990s, the SEC's influence over its employees had almost disappeared. The rise in asbestos-related disease in the 1990s coincided with the privatisation of power generation and the departure of SEC from the Valley. Many

80 Latrobe Regional Hospital — history: <http://www.lrh.com.au/about-lrh/organisational-information/about-lrh>

81 Hannah H. Walker and Anthony D. LaMontagne 2004. 'Work and Health in the Latrobe Valley: Community perspectives on asbestos issues: Final report', p. 3.

82 The Australian Asbestos Network website 2018, Asbestos in the Latrobe Valley.

83 Cecily Hunter and A.D. LaMontagne 2012. 'Dust in the Air in 1950s Victoria: History has lessons for twenty-first century workers in dusty environments', We Are Unions OHS Reps website: <http://www.ohsrep.org.au/news-and-views/features/dust-in-the-air-in-1950s-victoria>

84 Hunter and LaMontagne 2012.

85 Walker and LaMontagne 2004, p. 7.

86 Hunter and LaMontagne 2012.

87 Hunter and LaMontagne 2012.

88 Walker and LaMontagne 2004, p. 9.

89 Community consultation, Moe, 17 May 2018.

90 Walker and LaMontagne 2004, pp. 7–8.

families in the Valley who had experienced the devastating impact of asbestos-related diseases and deaths by then were still finding it difficult to get adequate care, information and facilities in the Latrobe Valley to cater for the rise in sufferers. The volunteer-run Gippsland Asbestos Related Diseases Support Inc. (GARDS) was established in 1991<sup>91</sup>. There is little information available about how asbestos risk has been managed by private companies other than their need for regulatory compliance.

In 2008, the Victorian Government recognised that, as a State Government authority, the actions of the SEC were ultimately the responsibility of the Victorian Government. The then Labor Premier, John Brumby officially apologised on behalf of the Victorian Government to the Valley's SEC workers and their families. "It is unacceptable", he said, "that any person, through the course of their work, is exposed to what we now know is a deadly substance"<sup>92</sup>.

The Charles Prust Memorial is the only monument to victims of asbestos-related illness in Victoria. It is a stained-glass window in St Aidan's Anglican Church, Newborough, in the Latrobe Valley. It is dedicated to Charles Prust, who died in the early 2000s from mesothelioma<sup>93</sup>. In 2003, twelve years after GARDS was established, the use, importation and exportation of asbestos was banned in Australia<sup>94</sup>. Three years later, advocacy and lobbying from GARDS as well as unions, law firms and medical professionals resulted in the establishment of a new cancer treatment centre at the Latrobe Regional Hospital in 2006. By 2015, GARDS had formed the Asbestos Council of Victoria to operate as their advocacy arm across Victoria<sup>95</sup>.

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91 GARDS website, 2018.

92 'Government apologises to asbestos victims', Mesothelioma Aid: <http://www.mesothelioma-aid.org/vicapology.htm>, [accessed 15 July 2018]; 'Brumby issues asbestos apology', *ABC News*, 28 November 2008: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2008-11-28/brumby-issues-asbestos-apology/222182> (accessed 15 July 2008).

93 Monument Australia website, 2018.

94 The Mesothelioma Centre website, n.d.

95 OHA Reps Website, 2015; Asbestos Council of Victoria (GARDS) website, 2018.

## Migration

Whilst the predominant ethnic group in the Latrobe Valley before the early twentieth century were people from the British Isles, there have since been settlers in the Valley from diverse backgrounds. Once Walhalla began to decline in the early 1900s, a number of Chinese market gardeners set up on the river flats in several towns. Europeans of various nationalities, including Italians, Swiss and Swedes, also left Walhalla and settled in the Valley around the time.

The operation of Brown Coal Mine from around 1916, and the subsequent development of Yallourn from the early 1920s attracted migrant workers. By the 1920s, there were Maltese and Italian workers at Brown Coal Mine. The timber industry also attracted European workers.

Large-scale industrial development in the 1940s and 1950s, and the urgent need for workers, brought people of many different nationalities to the Valley. A great influx of European migrants, dubbed 'New Australians', settled in the Latrobe Valley from the 1940s to the 1960s, as part of a large-scale program of postwar immigration to Australia. Many postwar migrants settled in Melbourne, but the urban centres of the Latrobe Valley attracted a great many migrants. The greatest groups were the Italians and Greeks, but there were also Germans, Dutch, and Poles. A number of Ukrainians who had come from displaced persons camps in Germany following the Second World War also settled in the Latrobe Valley in the 1950s.

Large numbers of migrant workers took up positions with the SEC at their new power station — the 'Morwell Project' — which had commenced in 1946, but which wasn't fully functioning until 1956. In 1961, when the average proportion of the Victorian population born overseas was 19.4 per cent, in the Latrobe Valley this figure was significantly higher at 25 per cent<sup>96</sup>.

On first arriving in the Latrobe Valley, some migrants initially faced hostility, prejudice and racial discrimination, and often this began in the school yard. Dutch migrant Henri Licht recalls in the 1950s that the children of different nationalities would keep to themselves in the playground of Sacred Heart Catholic primary school in Morwell<sup>97</sup>. Joyce Clam, who later married Stasys Petrauskas, lived near the North Camp at Yallourn North and recounts that the prejudice experienced by migrants was fueled by the



*Natale Bassi, blacksmith and coachbuilder, Traralgon, 1920s (source: reproduced with permission from Co.As.It, Italian Historical Society)*

assumption that everybody that 'came out here was German. And they just didn't like Germans'<sup>98</sup>. Henri Licht, who arrived with his family at Morwell in the early 1950s, was also alarmed at seeing German immigrants working in their shirtsleeves and noticing the swastikas tattoos on their underarms<sup>99</sup>. Whether it was the rigour of work, friction with the Australians, pre-disposition caused by war and years spent in Europe's Displaced Person camps, or for other reasons, several of the immigrant Lithuanians who had settled at North Camp slipped into a depressed, or otherwise disturbed state of mind<sup>100</sup>. Whilst most migrants obtained employment without much difficulty, many faced obstacles in getting access to housing. For some migrants fleeing war-ravaged Europe, these difficulties were in addition to the trauma and grief they carried

<sup>96</sup> Langmore 2013, p. 107.

<sup>97</sup> Licht 2015 (no page numbers).

<sup>98</sup> Sestokas 2010, p. 103.

<sup>99</sup> Licht 2015 (no page numbers).

<sup>100</sup> Sestokas 2010, p. 11.



from their wartime experiences in Europe. Migrants were not eligible for the public housing provided by the Housing Commission of Victoria unless they had been in Australia for three years or had been naturalised as Australian citizens.

Whilst many migrants undoubtedly would have faced trauma and challenges associated with re-settlement in a new country, this varied according to people's background and personal situations, and possibly their overall outlook. Despite the difficulties faced by many postwar migrants, the experience of most migrants in the Latrobe Valley tended to be a positive one. New arrivals were glad to be in a country of 'opportunity'; they worked hard and contributed to the local community in many ways, for example in terms of local commerce and industry, food and retailing, and sport and to public life. In many cases, old hostilities were pushed aside in the new country. One community member commented, "people who had been fighting each other in the war worked together here"<sup>101</sup>. Certainly the overall experience of multiculturalism in the Latrobe Valley has been beneficial and enriching.

From the end of the war and up until 1953, many migrants arrived at the West Sale Migrant Centre where they were accommodated for a period of time before being allocated work. On leaving the centre, migrants tended to find accommodations near their own discrete national groups which, although not exclusive enclaves, became associated with their cultural identity. British immigrants were concentrated around Morwell and Yallourn; Dutch and German immigrants were located around Moe; the Italians at Morwell; and the Maltese at Yallourn North which had evolved from the North Camp settlement at the Brown Coal Mine where the Maltese community had been living since the 1920s<sup>102</sup>.

There was a large influx of English migrants in the late 1940s, some of whom arrived with qualifications. Many settled in Newborough and some brought out pre-fabricated housing from Britain<sup>103</sup>. The Anglican bishop of Gippsland was aware of the impending population influx to take place in the Latrobe Valley in the postwar years and ensured that the Anglican churches were ready to accommodate new parishioners. At the Anglican Church Synod in 1949 the local bishop



*Members of Italian community at Dutch cabaret (source: reproduced with permission of Co.As.It. – Italian Historical Society)*

<sup>101</sup> Community consultation, Moe, 17 May 2018.

<sup>102</sup> Zubrzycki 1964, p. 20.

<sup>103</sup> Goulding 2016, p. 30.

advised that his church had 'secured fine sites for schools and churches and rectories near Morwell, Newborough, Morwell West, Moe and Yinnar'<sup>104</sup>.

The nationwide Good Neighbour Council established by the Australian Government in 1949 comprised a group of 133 organisations that helped to assimilate newcomers into Australian life<sup>105</sup>. In the Latrobe Valley, the Apex Clubs in Moe and Morwell embraced the principles of the Good Neighbour Council in seeking to attract immigrant members. Their president in 1961 was a Hungarian migrant who recounted how it was through the Apex Club that he 'learned to know and love my new country'. Appointed as his Apex club's representative to the Good Neighbour Council, he found 'new faces, leading citizens in our community who can always find time to assist the migrants in their problems, citizens who can see the potentialities of this great migration programme'<sup>106</sup>. Mothers' clubs, the CWA, and church groups provided opportunities and assistance for association between community groups and nationalities.

Sport was also an important way for European migrants to meet people and celebrate culture. Italian migrants introduced the game of bocce and they were also involved, along with other European migrant groups, in the promotion of soccer. The European game, known as the 'international', was immediately popular in the postwar years and saw migrants in the Latrobe Valley 'flock in their hundreds'. The *Advocate* reported in 1961 that

*The very large crowds watching the International Soccer series at Yallourn on Sunday saw the young Australia team go down three goals to one to the stronger Rest of Europe side ... the three o'clock match was a well merited draw: Germany 2, Holland 2*<sup>107</sup>.

Migrant communities supported one another in their adjustment to Australian life, and across the Latrobe Valley support networks were established by the different ethnic groups. This included the Poulos Cafe at West Camp, Yallourn, which served as 'a laundry depot, a newsagency where



Australian Prime Minister Bob Hawke at the Gippsland Migrant Resource Centre, 1988 (source: reproduced with permission of Co.As.It. – Italian Historical Society)

104 *Gippsland Times*, 28 April 1949, p. 4.

105 *Age*, 9 May 1953, p. 5.

106 Zubrzycki 1964, pp. 152–53.

107 Zubrzycki 1964, pp. 149–50.

Greek language newspaper and books are on sale and a travel agency for the men who wish to discuss travel arrangements for their wives, fiancées and members of the family left behind in Greece', and an espresso bar for Italians in Yallourn<sup>108</sup>.

Further to these informal social meeting places, more formally defined migrant social clubs that provided welfare, social support and advice included the Italian–Australian Social Club of Gippsland, based in Morwell; the Contra Club organised by the German community members; Dutch Social Club in Moe; Dutch Choir and Ladies Club; Polish Association of the Latrobe Valley; Ukrainian Association in Newborough and the Scots Club in Moe<sup>109</sup>.

As well as providing assistance and entertainment, cultural clubs aimed to foster respect and understanding of the founding traditions of their culture amongst the younger generations. The Ukrainian Association for example combined 'welfare and recreation to perpetuate among the immigrants and their children an attachment to the Ukrainian national traditions', and the Polish likewise had the aim to provide 'relief to compatriots in need ... as well as the organization of celebrations on Poland's National Day'<sup>110</sup>. The Polish community also ran a Polish language class.

Although the Congregational and Anglican churches in the Latrobe Valley planned for extra services for the new British migrants expected in the Latrobe Valley<sup>111</sup>, churches specific to the migrant cultures were also established, including a Greek Orthodox Church in Morwell and Lutheran Church in Newborough. Religious congregations played an important part, along with connections with friends and neighbours, in the period of adjustment of a migrant arriving in

Australia. In the Latrobe Valley the Catholic Church was of particular importance not only to the Italian community but also to the Maltese community, who did not initially appear to have a culturally specific cultural forum in which to meet<sup>112</sup>. A Maltese community centre was established in the 1970s and expanded in the 1990s. There are plans for the first Maltese–Australian museum to be established in Morwell.

In the late 1950s a survey found that the Maltese made up the largest ethnic group employed by the SEC that came from outside the British Isles. The same survey also found that East Newborough had a large number of English migrants<sup>113</sup>. A study of immigration to the Latrobe Valley by sociologist Dr J. Zubrzycki, completed in 1964, found that immigrants from Eastern Europe were much more likely to own their own home than those from western European countries, including the British, Dutch and Germans, who were more likely to rent a home from the SEC or the Housing Commission<sup>114</sup>.

The Gippsland Migrant Resource Centre (now Gippsland Multicultural Services) was established in the 1970s. It was staffed (initially) by volunteers who assisted new immigrants to the region who needed help with filling out forms, and accessing accommodation, employment and education. Another local initiative is the International Women's Group, founded by Soula Kanellopoulos in the mid-1990s, which provided support and resources to migrant women in the Latrobe Valley. In recognition of the significant contribution of immigrants to the region, the Gippsland Immigration Wall of Recognition and Heritage Walk were opened at the Gippsland Immigration Park in Morwell in 2007. The Immigration Wall records the names of immigrants who came from all over the world to settle in Gippsland<sup>115</sup>.

108 Zubrzycki 1964, pp. 146, 147.

109 Zubrzycki 1964, pp. 147, 148, 150.

110 Zubrzycki 1964, pp. 148, 149.

111 *Gippsland Times*, 28 April 1949, p. 4.

112 Zubrzycki 1964, pp. 122, 146, 148, 149.

113 *Age*, 11 February 1959, p. 11.

114 *Age*, 9 October 1964, p. 5.

115 <http://www.gippslandimmigrationpark.com.au/>

## Don Di Fabrizio: From Italy to Morwell

Donato (Don) Di Fabrizio OAM, was born in 1933 in Lama, Dei Peligni, Chieti, Abruzzo, Italy. He arrived in Gippsland in 1954, working initially for the SEC as a boilermaker, and later with the Italian firm Electric Power Transmission at Yallourn, before contracting steel works himself. In 1961, Don and his brother John started a steel construction business based in Morwell, which operated as D. and G. Di Fabrizio Steel Fabrication and Erection. This company grew to become very successful and emerged as a leader in steel fabrication.

Don Di Fabrizio brought energy and foresight to the Latrobe Valley, where a large part of industrial work was operating through the broad platform of the SEC. Their company built a number of impressive structures in Melbourne, including the steel framework for the Melbourne Exhibition Centre.

Don is passionate about soccer. In 1969 he became president of the Morwell Falcons Soccer Club. At that time it was a small country club and over the years, with his leadership he took the club through all the Victorian Soccer Divisions right up to the National Soccer League. It was a highly successful achievement for the club and for the Latrobe Valley. Don has held many senior positions within Australian Soccer, culminating in becoming a director of Soccer Australia.

His legacy to the Australian football code, Aussie Rules, is the fabrication and erection of the steelwork for the 'Great Southern Stand' at the Melbourne Cricket Ground. The stand seats 48,000 people and was opened in March 1992.

Don is also passionate about local history. He was instrumental in developing the Gippsland Immigration Park and Wall of Recognition in Morwell, and together with Graham Goulding, a local historian, he helped to produce the publication, *A Walk Through Gippsland History*, in 2015.



*Don Di Fabrizio and co-workers working for an Italian firm at Yallourn, 1956 (source: reproduced with permission from Co.As.It, Italian Historical Society)*



*Di Fabrizio Brothers' first factory, 1962 (reproduced with permission from Co.As.It, Italian Historical Society)*



## Lost places

As the large-scale plans to expand the open-cut at Morwell were pushing ahead in the late 1940s, the housing expert F. Oswald Barnett warned in 1948 that the decision to build a new town on top of a coal field that would be used in the future was poorly considered. He argued that the issue for the future would not be the economies of coal depth but 'compensation of abandonment of a complete new town'<sup>116</sup>.

The people whose lives were lived within this 'town property' felt the dismissal of their place in the town bitterly. Historian Peter Read has described the vast black hole in the ground where Yallourn used to be as 'haunting' to former residents<sup>117</sup>. More recently, the memory of Yallourn has been kept alive through a digital project of the Yallourn Old Girls' Association (YOGA) called 'Virtual Yallourn'<sup>118</sup>. Former residents have formed a web-based online community that has recreated their lost town and its demolished buildings in a very different format. They explain that 'this is the only way we can revisit our town with our children and grandchildren' and invite visitors to 'see the many photos and house plans, navigate around our 3D Town, read information, memories and stories. Most of all, play a part in it with us by adding your own photos and memories'<sup>119</sup>.

Various relics of lost Yallourn are treasured by its former residents. Many of Yallourn's former homes were purchased by their occupants from the mid-1970s and relocated elsewhere. Some residents souvenired the Yallourn bricks from their homes and used them as brick paving at their new home sites<sup>120</sup>. Other elements of the town were repurposed. The bronze bust of Sir John Monash, erected at Yallourn after his death in 1931, survives intact — a tribute to his towering importance in the town. This was re-located to Powerworks Education Centre in Morwell. The Yallourn war memorial was relocated to Newborough. A poignant surviving relic of Yallourn is part of an avenue of Oak trees that once lined Latrobe Street.



*Memorial to Sir John Monash, originally mounted in Monash Square, Yallourn and later moved to Powerworks. Sculpture by Paul Montford (source: Three Decades, 1949)*

The new town of Churchill was established in 1968 in anticipation of the loss of Yallourn. Again, this was a well laid out town and was designed by the Housing Commission of Victoria. However, as this new town was not owned by the SEC, it was not so rigorously controlled and residents were free to purchase their own homes.

<sup>116</sup> Age, 3 September 1948, p. 2; Barnett is responding to Harold Greenway, 'Building a Town on a Brown Coal Field', Age, 30 August 1948, p. 2.

<sup>117</sup> Peter Read 2003, *Haunted Earth*, University of NSW Press, Sydney, p. 232.

<sup>118</sup> Yallourn Old Girls Association (YOGA) Inc., 'Virtual Yallourn': <http://www.virtualyallourn.com>

<sup>119</sup> Yallourn Old Girls Association (YOGA) Inc., 'Virtual Yallourn': <http://www.virtualyallourn.com>

<sup>120</sup> Peter Read 1997, *Returning to Nothing: The meaning of lost places*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, p. 99.



*Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Phillip visited Yallourn as part of the 1954 Royal Tour (source: SEC records, VPRS 9675/P1, unit 93, PROV)*

## Looking back, looking forwards

History has been important to the communities of the Valley as a way of defining identity and for providing a connection for people to the old places of the past. The interwar period in particular marked a juncture between the past and the future. At the popular 'back to' celebrations of the late 1920s and 1930s — at Moe, Morwell and Rosedale — former residents enjoyed a week of reunions, community activities and entertainment. These events involved a nostalgic representation of the local past but also welcomed the progress heralded by industrial development. The 'comebacks' — those who returned to their places of their youth — revisited their old schools and local landmarks, also enjoyed tours of the impressive new power stations that promised economic growth and local employment opportunities.

Within twenty years, however, with the fast-paced development of the postwar years, the dramatic progress of the Latrobe Valley seemed to overwhelm the past. By the 1960s, there was little left of the nineteenth century villages of Moe and Morwell. Whilst there was little evidence of local grievances stemming from the great benefits that further industrialisation promised the region, it was perhaps this dramatic change to the Valley

that prompted not only retrospection but some practical steps to preserve the local past for future generations. Historical societies were formed at Traralgon, Morwell and Moe in the 1960s and 1970s, and Old Gippsstown, a historical tourist town, was established in the early 1970s. This reconstructed assemblage of nineteenth century buildings from Gippsland has been designed to represent Gippsland in the 1920s — before the dramatic industrial development had commenced. It presents a slow-paced world complete with horse drawn vehicles and old world technology<sup>121</sup>.

In 1986, Dr Meredith Fletcher, then-Director of the Centre for Gippsland Studies, declared that 'history is alive and well in Gippsland'<sup>122</sup>. Fletcher was writing as editor of the regional history journal, *Gippsland Heritage Journal*, and she and others were also involved in running a successful local history program at the Centre for Gippsland Studies at Churchill from the 1980s. In more recent years, local historians have not only considered the earlier past, the development of farming and the arrival of new industries in the Valley, but are now examining the SEC's vast industrial enterprises of the Latrobe Valley.



Locals dressed up in period costume at Old Gippsstown, Moe (source: Moe & District Historical Society)

<sup>121</sup> George Gunton 1996, *Travellers in Time: Living history in Australia*, Oceans Enterprises, Yarram.

<sup>122</sup> Meredith Fletcher, Editorial, *Gippsland Historical Journal*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1986, p. 2.

## Pat Bartholomeusz: Dedicated to saving a town and a community

Wilfred Everard ('Pat') Bartholomeusz was born in the 1930s in Columbo, Sri Lanka, of Dutch ancestry. He arrived in Australia as a migrant in the 1950s through the Burgher Settlement League, which assisted Sri Lankan burghers (those with European ancestry) in migrating to Australia.

On arriving in Australia, Pat had no carpentry skills and did not feel competent building his own home, which was a common endeavour at the time, and hence he was attracted to the SEC as a place to work because it offered staff housing. He and his wife moved into a house in Newborough, and became active in the local community and the local Methodist (later Uniting) Church. Pat served as a councillor for the Shire of Moe and became Mayor.

In 1969–70, when the SEC declared that Yallourn would be demolished, Pat became involved in the Save Yallourn Committee. He urged the Moe Shire Council to fight to retain the township and its valuable facilities. At a community meeting Pat put forward a motion to save the town, insisting: "don't vote for this motion unless you're prepared to stand in front of the bulldozers". Despite widespread support from the local community and the unions, the Save Yallourn Committee ultimately lost their battle.

Pat believes that the SEC sought to demolish Yallourn not because of the coal under the ground but because the town was unviable due to the significant costs of staff housing and general maintenance.

In the wake of Yallourn's demise, Pat was involved in the resettlement and augmentation of facilities at Moe. He worked strenuously as a local councillor to have Yallourn residents resettled adequately, and to have their homes properly refurbished and in compliance with building regulations. The surrounding towns — Moe, Morwell, Traralgon and Newborough — were all allocated a portion of Yallourn's public facilities and services.



*Photo provided by Pat Bartholomeusz, 2019*

Pat was employed as an accountant with the SEC and was an active union member with the Municipal Employees' Association. He is modest about his achievements. He feels that "somehow coming to Australia changed me. I got that ability to speak up". He also feels that he was "nurtured in this community" and that helped him to develop the necessary skills to work effectively in community action.

Pat is also involved in assisting new migrants to Australia and in 2010 he was awarded a Victorian Multicultural Award for Excellence.



## Reconnecting to Country

The Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation (GLaWAC) has been the Registered Aboriginal Party for the Gunai area since 2006, representing Gunaikurnai people in native title, cultural heritage, and land, water and resource management<sup>123</sup>. On 22 October 2010 the Gunaikurnai were recognised by the Federal Court of Australia to hold native title to most of the country across Gippsland. On the same day the first Traditional Owner Settlement Agreement in Victoria was signed between the Victorian Government and the Gunaikurnai. The Agreement covers Country from near Warragul in the west to the Snowy River in the east, and from the Great Dividing Range to 200 metres off the coastline. The Gunaikurnai were granted Aboriginal native title to the Tarra–Bulga National Park, at the southern edge of the Latrobe Valley, as well as to nine other parks and reserves across Gippsland. Together with the Victorian Government, they are jointly responsible for the management of these parks and reserves<sup>124</sup>. The Gunaikurnai hold the right to access Crown land for traditional purposes.

This assertion of the Aboriginal past in Gippsland did not come easily or quickly. It has been a long battle. Gunaikurnai elder Uncle Albert Mullett (1933–2014) lived at Lake Tyers Mission as a child in the 1930s, before moving around East Gippsland and southern New South Wales with his family doing seasonal work. Albert Mullett was more attracted to the traditional teachings of elders and others within his Indigenous community than he was to the teachings of a

conventional school. As he grew older and travelled more he became more and more conscious of the treatment of Aboriginal people by government and religious authorities, of the lack of Aboriginal studies in the school curriculum, and of the harmful disconnection between Aboriginal people and their Country, culture, traditions, knowledge, stories, art and crafts<sup>125</sup>. Stories about places have a tendency to focus on more well known cultures and histories, and in an interview for the ABC's Alpine Stories series Uncle Albert said that "of course it's always been about the cattlemen, always been the chalets or tourism and we never even got a mention. There was no recognition or respect shown to our people, only a short story maybe about the bogong moth feasting and gathering"<sup>126</sup>.

To counter this, Mullett became a teacher of Aboriginal culture at Bairnsdale Primary School, to the east of the Valley, and then a spokesperson for Aboriginal education, eventually campaigning successfully for Aboriginal studies at every level from primary to tertiary studies. In doing so he helped to establish the first course in Aboriginal Studies in Victoria. This was conducted at the Gippsland campus of Monash University at Churchill. He furthered the cause of promoting Aboriginal culture when he helped to establish The Keeping Place in Bairnsdale, East Gippsland. It was at The Keeping Place that Grattan Mullett took up a traineeship and "became more aware about my own identity ... I'll always have [that] with me now"<sup>127</sup>.

123 'About GLAWAC', <https://gunaikurnai.org/about-glawac/> (accessed 10 July 2018).

124 'Gunaikurnai Native Title Agreement', Department of Justice: <http://www.justice.vic.gov.au/home/your+rights/native+title/gunaikurnai+native+title+agreement> (accessed 10 July 2018); 'Gunaikurnai Native Title Agreement', Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation, <https://gunaikurnai.org/gunaikurnai-native-title-agreement/> (accessed 10 July 2018).

125 'Uncle Albert Mullett', Deadly Story website, <https://www.deadlystory.com/page/culture/my-stories/Albert-Mullett> (accessed 10 July 2018).

126 Uncle Albert Mullett, interviewed by Richard Snashall, ABC's Alpine Stories series, 13 August, 2016, <https://www.deadlystory.com/page/culture/my-stories/Albert-Mullett> (accessed 16 July 2018).

127 Grattan Mullett, interviewed by Richard Snashall, ABC's 'Alpine Stories' series, 13 August 2016, <https://www.deadlystory.com/page/culture/my-stories/Albert-Mullett> (accessed 16 July 2018).

# Conclusion

The communities of the Latrobe Valley have experienced considerable change. Traditional Owner communities living in the Valley (and the wider Gippsland region) for tens of thousands of years witnessed the arrival of colonial explorers and settlers. Their complex social arrangements and deep appreciation of Country evolved over many generations. The Traditional Owners have lived through the transformation of their traditional environments.

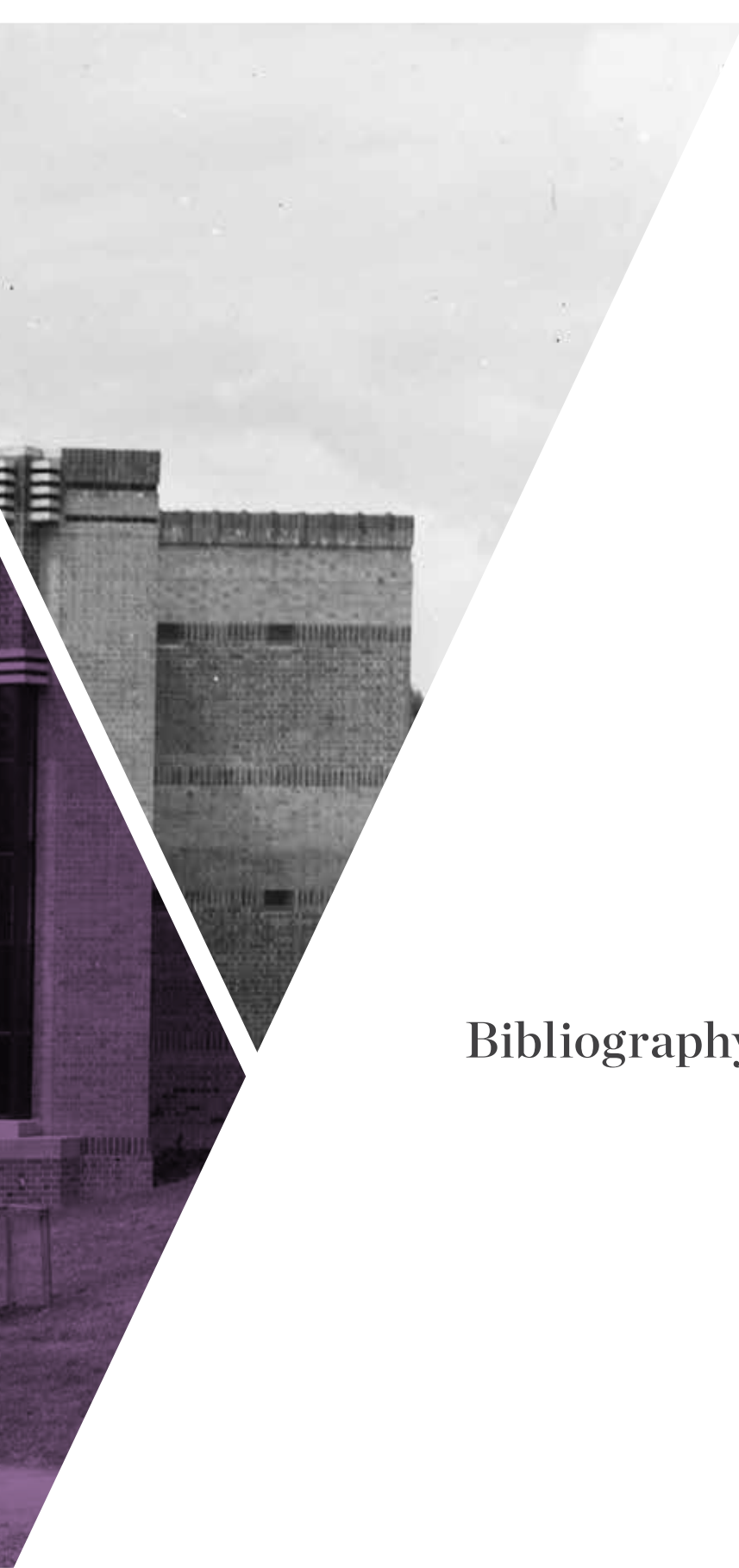
Settlers arrived and worked the land to provide food and fibre to the growing colony and beyond. The settlers established formal social institutions such as churches and clubs to support their life in towns and the rural region. The commencement of the mining industries and power generation resulted in major changes to the rural settings of the Valley. The scale of these industries led to a new way of living in this region. The dominance of the SEC, with its strong technical and engineering workforce, shaped many elements of social life. Migrants arriving to work in the Valley introduced significant cultural diversity that was unusual for regional Victoria at the time.

Family life saw women working in the home and being the mainstay of many social services. Women were also part of the workforce in many factories, businesses, hospitals and places of education. Sporting clubs and community service groups allowed people to engage with one another outside their specific workplaces. Access to the mountains, the bush, and waterways and beaches meant that recreation time in the Valley was widely available to many families.

This report records how the various social and civil foundations emerged in the Valley and how these have changed over time. A new wave of change is facing the Valley communities. Economic transitions are again affecting the Valley communities, in terms of their working lives and social lives. The life-cycle of the coal mines is entering its next phase as miners plan for the rehabilitation phase for these major sites. The communities' response to these changes will become a part of this on-going story of the Valley.

This report provides a small part of the big story of the Latrobe Valley. The history is being explored from a number of perspectives and this report has focused in particular on the social aspects of life in the Valley. The Reference Guide which accompanies this Social History is also available and gives readers a starting point for deeper research and reading. It provides further information on sources, groups and places where more information can be obtained.





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