

DEVELOPMENT OF AREA'S ECONOMY

Transport

In the early days of the Korong diggings, provisions were often scarce. Tracks were rough and circuitous and often carriers risked attack from bush-rangers. James Paterson was a carrier in the early days between Melbourne and Korong when freight rates were £105 per ton. Mr. Paterson erected the East Charlton bridge over the Avoca River in 1860, which was replaced in the 1920's by a concrete bridge.

The Railways first opened a line from Korong Vale to Inglewood, on 15th April, 1882. This was followed on 21st April, 1887 by a line between Wedderburn Junction and Wedderburn. Prior to this time passengers wishing to travel to Melbourne travelled by coach from Korong to Sandhurst and thence by train to Melbourne. The opening of the rail service to Wedderburn was celebrated by a banquet in the old Institute Hall, at which the Attorney-General (Sir Henry Wrixon), the Hon. James Bell (Minister of Defence) and the local members of Parliament (Messrs. George E. Bouchier and Thomas Langdon) were entertained. Mr. Maurice Burke was appointed Station-Master.

Rail service commenced with three trains each way daily; two being mixed trains connecting with Melbourne and the other being a through train from Melbourne.

Due to decreasing patronage train services were gradually reduced, until in 1947 passenger services were discontinued. The line is currently a goods line with one train per week.

Cement

Cement was discovered in ten or twelve different hills in the early days. The material was crushed for two years, paying £2-10-0d. a week to each of the four men involved in the business. The greatest amount of work done was at Glasgow Hill, three miles from Wedderburn. There was always the chance of gold discoveries in the cement, and this encouraged men in their activities. An expert has commented that there are still millions of tons of cement left in the hills.

Eucalyptus

Two Eucalyptus factories started in Wedderburn in December, 1902, it being proved that the oil distilled from the mallee leaves is superior to any obtained elsewhere. Mr. Hore built a factory on the Main Flat whilst Mr. A. Gruner used the surplus steam from his sawmill for distillation of eucalyptus.

Up until recently, three distilleries still remained in the Wedderburn area. The eucalyptus oil was refined at Korong Vale and exported all over the world.

Flour Mill

The Korong Flour Mill Company commenced business in September, 1888. It carried on business until the 1900's, when it was gutted by fire.

Wheat

Wheat was first produced by Mr. Joseph Morecroft at Richmond Plains in 1862. He grew sixty bushels of wheat to the acre off virgin land, and was first

to introduce a winnower into the district.

Samuel Rinder, in his article "More about the Northern Farmer", in the Melbourne Review of 1884, speaks at first hand of the problems of the early selector.

"It is of the settlers on the plains, however, that I have chiefly to tell my story. The timber for their fences had to be dragged great distances, and the posts and rails were made as light as possible in order to save carriage. The result of this necessary, but unfortunate economy, is to be seen now in the scores of miles of decaying fences, which cannot be repaired, and must shortly be replaced at greater cost than at first. The difficulty of getting timber caused wire to be substituted whenever it could be obtained, and the price of this was added to the fast increasing debt. A very slight calculation will show that the absolutely necessary expenditure required for fencing the boundaries of the land and around the cultivation; building the very roughest hut large enough to shelter even a small family; buying implements, and putting in, say, twenty acres of crop, which was about the average of the first year; paying rent and rates, and living in the most economical fashion whilst the crop grew - would amount, at the very lowest estimate, to £250. I know that in the majority of cases this was far exceeded. During the second year the area under crop was generally increased, and where no clearing had to be done, the full complement required by the Act, namely, thirty-two acres, was put in. In the third year this was again increased in the cases of men having means to carry out their work properly; but, long before this, many of those who had started without capital were compelled to either work for their richer neighbours; or to earn wages elsewhere, in order to keep the wolf from the door; for by this time the trusting storekeepers had themselves begun to feel the strain on their resources, and were getting more and more in arrears with their Melbourne merchants and their bankers"

However, since that time, wheat-growing has usually been very successful in the Wimmera area; as have oats and barley.

Sheep

John Catto introduced sheep to the district. He had a run of 64,000 acres in 1840 which was capable of holding 14,000 sheep.

Both Mr. J.R. Gray and Mr. J. Paterson were noted breeders of merino sheep in the early days.

Orchards

Mr. Joseph Morecroft grew a variety of citrus fruits as early as 1867.

Secondary Industries

A boot-upper factory was opened by the Premier at Wedderburn on 1st November, 1945. This factory provided employment for about forty employees until its closure in June, 1957. The site of the factory was the former Commercial Hotel. A dressing-gown factory was opened on the same premises on 22nd March, 1964.

As the local soil had always appeared suitable for making bricks, people had thought for many years of establishing a brick factory. The thought pro-

gressed to reality in 1950 when a brick kiln was built. For three years the kiln produced a good supply of bricks to such places as Swan Hill, Charlton, Wycheproof and Wedderburn. In Wedderburn, the Shire Offices, the hospital extensions and many private homes were built from the local product. However, because of financial difficulties the factory was closed and sold in 1965.

Honey has also been an income earner in the Wedderburn area and some people still supplement their income from this industry.

Mr. Samuel Rinder, in the Melbourne Review of 1884, says of the wine and dried fruit industries at Wedderburn -

"Thus, separated from one of my wheat paddocks by a chain road, is a small plot of nine acres, which has been a vineyard for many years. This year my wise neighbour - who laughs at my wheat growing, and with good cause, though he grows some himself - has made from nine acres 4,500 gallons of wine, which he sells readily in the district at from 5s.0d. to 6s.0d. per gallon. This wine is chiefly from the red Hermitage grape, and is a rich, strong, fruity wine; such as is said to be in great demand in Europe for mixing purposes. About a mile from my house in one direction is a similar plot, in which fruit trees are added to the vines, and from what I saw this year some splendid examples of dried apples, apricots, raisins, almonds and other fruits. At the same distance in another direction is a much smaller plot, from which the owner showed, at a recent local gathering, upwards of fifty different sorts of apples, each one almost perfect of its kind. A neighbour of his grows the Zante currant, and dries it successfully. On the edge, if not within, a small patch of mallee, a little further off, are grown the finest grapes I ever saw in the colony; and the owner of this vineyard is also a bee-keeper, and makes capital mead".

Robert Twiddy is said to have produced the first dried raisins and currants in the district. Mr. J. Trotman, of the Federal Vineyard, Kurraca, advertised Colonial Wine for sale in 1889 at 3s.0d. per gallon bulk. Mr. Trotman stated that he had obtained four awards at the Centennial Exhibition in 1888 - 9 for his wine.

A steam sawmill was being operated by Thos. McLernon and Son in 1889.

Gundawarra Boomerangs Proprietary Limited, an approved decentralised industry, moved to Wedderburn in November, 1972. The Company manufactures boomerangs and provides examples of pioneers' huts, farm equipment, etc. for the tourist trade.