

Tramping in Queensland. These sketches of life on the road are by Hugh Hamilton, a young British immigrant.  
BRISBANE CITY ART GALLERY AND MUSEUM

# PEOPLE MOVING

TOWARDS THE END of 1888, young Randolph Bedford boarded the train from Adelaide to Melbourne. He had already journeyed overland from his native Sydney via the Riverina and the booming silver city, Broken Hill. But depressed Adelaide disappointed him and he soon forsook it for the glitter of 'Marvellous Melbourne', a 'human ant-hill where everyone was making money ... and where everyone was in a hurry'. To get on, Bedford believed, you had to be prepared to move on. Many other Australians shared his belief and would remember 1888 as the year when they arrived in the country, changed jobs, moved house or made a long journey. Seldom in the nineteenth century had so many Australians been on the move. Like a mighty pump, the boom economy sucked in people from abroad and accelerated their movement around the colonies.

In their centennial tributes to the country's pioneers, historians often depicted 'the settler' as the ideal Australian. They praised the steadiness and perseverance of those who had cleared the land, established farms and towns and become the stalwarts of their local communities. Yet many of Australia's notables could be better described as movers than as settlers, for they attributed their success as much to their mobility and adaptability as to their steady industry. Benjamin Hosking's was among the several thousand small-time success stories honoured by inclusion in the centennial history, *Victoria and its metropolis*.

*Hosking, Benjamin J.*, Melbourne, was born at Moonee Ponds, Victoria, in 1849. After residing in and about Melbourne until 1862, he commenced to learn the trade of watchmaker, at which, however, he remained only for a year. He was employed at lamp lighting for a time, and afterwards was engaged in a fruit shop at Ballarat for six months. Returning to Melbourne, he went to school for a year, and then worked at a tannery and curriery in Richmond for eighteen months, and at a bakery for a time. Soon afterwards he was with Mr. Pickett, butcher, Brunswick-street, Fitzroy, and for five years with Mr. J. Kerr, butcher, Queen-street. On his return in 1870 from a visit to New Zealand, where he was

employed for six months in a restaurant, he was again engaged as assistant to Mr. J. Kerr, Melbourne. Leaving his service in 1872, he started a butchering business on his own account in Little Bourke-street, and carried it on until 1879, when he bought a business at Epping, about thirteen miles from Melbourne. A year later he returned to Melbourne, and soon (1881) purchased a business in Little Lonsdale-street, which he now carries on, with a branch establishment in the rapidly improving district of St. George's-road, North Fitzroy.

By his fortieth year Hosking had changed jobs thirteen times and had worked at seven different occupations. He had moved from city to country and, for a short time, to another colony. His career, though, was not unusual. Another Melburnian, the hardware merchant John Chandler, had worked in eight different occupations, changed jobs seventeen times and moved house thirteen times by his fiftieth birthday.

Mobility was the unspoken assumption behind many everyday customs and beliefs. It explains why many an Australian put a low value upon formal apprenticeship and preferred to be known as a 'jack-of-all-trades'. Employers bemoaned the shortage of skilled tradesmen; but in the bush, especially, the man or woman with a smattering of skills might have been more useful than the specialist. Skilled tradesmen, especially in the construction industries, expected to have to move throughout their working lives and often carried copies of their indentures, references or trade union tickets as proof of their skills. Many voluntary associations, such as churches and friendly societies, also had formal procedures for easing the passage of members from one congregation or branch to another.

Unmarried young people moved more frequently than their elders. From the time of leaving school until their wedding days, often an interval of a decade or more, young Australians might follow the fortunes of the labour market from one end of the country to the other. Most of Benjamin Hosking's and John Chandler's many moves were concentrated in their teens and early twenties. The turbulence of youth was therefore physical as well as emotional, and it was only when people married that they usually 'settled down'.

Since the gold era, when thousands of young diggers had rushed from field to field on the strength of the slightest rumour, colonial society had also gradually settled down. Yet the boom of the 1880s once again redrew the map of economic opportunity and the rapid development of transport and communications brought the remote inland within reach of the coastal cities. While the fortune-seekers of the 1850s had tramped from town to town, the fortune-seekers of the 1880s rode the railways from colony to colony, like Randolph Bedford. By the time he was thirty-three, Bedford had had twenty-five jobs in seven different occupations in four different colonies.

Australia was a mosaic of pastoral, mining, farming, forest and urban regions. Each region had its own seasons and cycles of activity, its own characteristic rhythms of life. But the boundaries between these regions were not fixed or impermeable. The regions were more like interconnected reservoirs than separate ponds, and people were constantly siphoned from one to the other as the demand for labour ebbed and flowed. The regions interpenetrated each other; their characteristic routines often meshed to create more complex, contrapuntal rhythms of activity. These cycles, however, did not harmonise smoothly; downswings in one region were not always balanced by upswings in another. Nor were the skills shed by a declining industry necessarily usable by its growing neighbour. From his bureaucratic lookout in Sydney the statistician Timothy Coghlan monitored the flows of labour from city to country and from colony to

*A tradesman's passport. When workers moved from place to place they often took a letter from the local branch of the union as proof of their skills and good financial standing.*  
MELBOURNE UNIVERSITY ARCHIVES





*Passengers on Redfern station, Sydney, ready to depart up-country. Illustrated Sydney News, May 1886.*

colony. Colonial politicians and administrators attempted to readjust the supply of labour by easing or stimulating the inflow of assisted immigrants, by issuing free railway passes to areas of labour shortage and by sponsoring relief works. But 'labour'—a convenient abstraction that represented many thousands of individual working men and women—did not necessarily flow freely from one regional reservoir to another. When people moved it was as often because they had been pushed out by the goad of unemployment as because they had been lured on by the carrot of opportunity.

On city wharves and railway platforms the currents of moving humanity met, mingled briefly and dispersed. As the traveller left Sydney's George Street and entered the Redfern railway station he approached a large train indicator surmounted by an imposing bank of clocks bearing the arrival and departure times of the main trunk lines. Over one and a half million passengers passed by the ticket counters, through the gates and on to the platforms of Redfern station in 1888, and at least as many more emerged from its portals to join the surging crowds of the metropolis. Through the gateway from platforms 1 and 2 came travellers from the Illawarra and the south coast, while platform 3 received the outback travellers on the Western Mail. The rapidly growing rail traffic from Victoria aboard the Melbourne express arrived on platform 5, and platforms 7, 8 and 9 catered for the northern lines through Gosford and Newcastle to Brisbane.

In the course of the year the streams of passengers passing through the metropolitan railway terminals ebbed and flowed. Some were commuters and holidaymakers making short trips; some were making long and arduous journeys. Some would soon move again; some were moving for good. Some moved to take up new jobs; some because their present jobs required them to move. Some were accompanied by their families; some had no families, or left them behind lamenting, or perhaps celebrating, their departure.

An observer who charted these currents and discerned the many motives that influenced them would have detected four main groups of people on the move. There were, first of all, the migrants who had decided to uproot their homes, pack

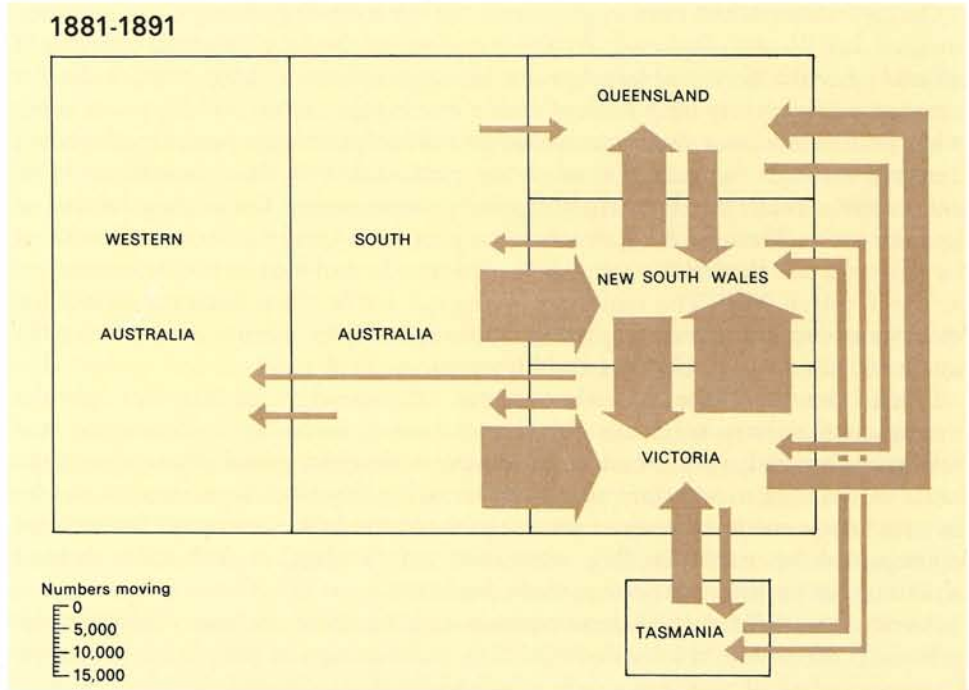
their belongings and move in search of a new job and a new home in another part of the country. Then there were the sojourners—people such as bank employees, schoolteachers and clergymen who were moved, at intervals, from posting to posting by their city employers. The third class of people moving were the professional travellers who moved the year around from place to place, buying, selling, entertaining or dispensing some other service for a living. And finally there were the nomads who travelled across country or down to the city for a few weeks or months of seasonal employment.

### MIGRANTS

People travelled for many reasons, but they usually migrated from regions of declining opportunity to regions where economic prospects were brighter. Migration was an essential means of readjustment in an economy that depended heavily on muscle power, and the strongest flows were associated with the most labour-intensive and volatile industries, such as mining, timber-getting and building. During the 1880s the geographical centre of the Australian population moved markedly to the north and east. Two colonies—South Australia and Tasmania—lost large numbers of their native sons and daughters. Victoria gained at the expense of Tasmania, New South Wales at the expense of Victoria and Queensland at the expense of both Victoria and New South Wales. But during 1888 all the other colonies appeared to have suffered a mass exodus to ‘Marvellous Melbourne’.

Since the 1850s young Tasmanians had grown up knowing that they faced the possibility of seeking their livelihood on the mainland. In the 1880s the exodus across Bass Strait continued, but thanks to the opening up of new mining fields and a revival of small-scale agriculture, the outward flow was reduced. Within the island, however, population moved away from the old-established pastoral and agricultural regions of the midlands towards the northern mining fields of Zeehan,

*Estimated numbers of Australian-born persons migrating between colonies between 1881 and 1891. The centre of the Australian-born population moved to the north and east during the 1880s.*  
D.T. ROWLAND



Heemskirk and Mount Bischoff, the potato-growing districts of the northwest coast and the apple and pear orchards of the Huon valley.

A run of bad seasons, which halted the northward march of the wheat frontier, forced many South Australian farmers to seek more promising land across the border in Victoria. Just over half the successful farmers in the eastern Wimmera were from South Australia and in the more recently settled western Wimmera the proportion was six out of ten. The earliest waves of migrants had left the Adelaide district in the 1860s for the southeast of South Australia and the Mount Gambier district where they had worked the land on rented farms before moving across the border to take up selections in the southeastern Wimmera in the mid-1870s. The immigrants of the 1880s, however, were more likely to come from the drought-stricken areas of Yorke Peninsula, the South Australian mallee or the arid north and to settle in the Victorian mallee. At the end of the decade more than 40 per cent of people in the newly settled Lawloit shire were South Australian-born. William Madge left his farm on Yorke Peninsula 'because the land was stony, and the Mallee land the Government had to let out was not worth cultivating' and in 1887 he selected 800 hectares near Dimboola. A year later two covered wagons, carrying the Altmans and their eight children, left their 200-hectare farm in South Australia to take up five square kilometres of rabbit-infested country near Warracknabeal. Like many of their fellow South Australians, the Altmans were of German descent and the Wimmera farming communities they helped to found already bore the imprint of their Lutheran religion and culture.

The exodus of South Australia's wheat farmers across the Victorian border was paralleled by the movement of miners from the declining copper mines of the Yorke Peninsula to Broken Hill. The collapse of copper prices had provided the stimulus, and the completion of the Adelaide–Silverton railway the means, for the mining captains of Moonta and Wallaroo to lead their men into a new field of opportunity. More than two-thirds of the Barrier miners came from South Australia, many of them Methodists transplanting the traditions of teetotalism and religious enthusiasm that their fathers had brought from the tin mining communities of Cornwall and Devon.

They were joined in Broken Hill by a further stream of emigrants from the gold towns of central Victoria. Sandhurst (Bendigo) and Ballarat, once the country's richest mineral towns, were in decline. More than half the boys born in Sandhurst were settling elsewhere. Some moved to the new mines of Tasmania and Queensland where their expertise in the techniques of hard rock mining helped to make them leaders of the industry. Others became farmers on the plains of north-central Victoria, while Ballarat's emigrants met the South Australians moving into the Wimmera or turned south into the wilds of south Gippsland.

Most of Victoria's more accessible land had long been settled, and would-be farmers had to be prepared to travel far and live rough in order to realise their dream of land ownership. The heavily forested backblocks of south Gippsland were pioneered by migrants from the Ballarat-Buninyong area. In 1883 George Matheson, a farmer's son from Clarendon, southeast of Ballarat, read a newspaper article praising Gippsland as 'the garden of Victoria, a land flowing with milk and honey etc'. He resolved to go and see for himself, but after inspecting some blocks along the main railway line, he had found nothing suitable. On the homeward train, however, he met a farmer who told him that there was good land for selection near his own farm further south and invited him to come and look it over. Back home, Matheson relayed news of the farmer's promise to his friends William and Henry Rainbow, who were also about to set off on a land hunt to Gippsland. They returned full of enthusiasm for the land around Poowong, each having selected a



*Rough-sawn timber cottage on Marley's Flat, Fernshaw, Victoria.*

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McIntosh's sawmill at Echuca, flood time 1887, by J.W. Curtis, shows one of the main industries of the Murray valley, where timber-getters and sawmillers harvested the fine stands of timber along the river, transported logs by cheap water transport and supplied fuel for the river steamers. Oil, 1887.

ART GALLERY OF  
NEW SOUTH WALES

240-acre (97-hectare) block. Soon their brothers Joseph and James, their sister, their friend W.G. Williams and Matheson himself had all made selections.

For the first year or so the new settlers moved to and fro between their new selections, where they camped and cleared during spring and early summer, and the Buninyong area, where they waited until the felled timber had dried out ready for burning. Not until two years later, when their first log hut had been replaced by a more commodious slab and iron house and their first herd was being milked did William's wife and the Rainbows' sister follow them to Gippsland.

As the last trees were felled, opening the way for farmers to occupy the land, the timber-getters and sawmillers who had been the first inhabitants of the woodlands moved on to a new section of the forest frontier. Henry Campey carted his family and his sawmilling plant all over Victoria and southern New South Wales and eventually into southern Queensland. From Yass, where he had seven sawmills under his charge in the mid-1870s, he travelled 150 kilometres east by horse and wagonette to Bundanoon for a railway contract before returning to the family home at Mount Macedon near Melbourne. In the late 1870s he moved from Macedon to Barnawartha in northeast Victoria, later managed a sawmill in Echuca and then moved across the Murray to Narrandera. In 1885, while recovering from an accident, he made two long journeys into southern Queensland intending to purchase some land. Nothing came of his explorations immediately, but two years later he uprooted his family again and moved them to a camp on the railway line between Brisbane and Beaudesert.

Migration was always a step into the unknown. But like migrants from overseas, cross-country migrants kept to known paths and settled among kinsfolk and acquaintances whenever they could. Their decision to move was often based on personal information and was preceded, as Campey's was, by a preliminary tour of inspection. They often moved by stages and relied on the help and hospitality of friends and relatives when they arrived in their new home. 'There were no hotels or accommodation places for miles around, but [the] early settlers gave, and gave of their best, and without their help many an arriving settler would have been greatly handicapped', one of the South Gippsland pioneers affirmed.

Country folk were renowned for their hospitality, but the lot of the newcomer to the metropolis was usually seen as a lonely and perilous one. Yet even amid the transience of the big city, rurally based networks of information and mutual aid eased the passage of the new arrival from the bush. Long-distance migration often came only after exploring more familiar lines of work and places nearer at hand.

Edward Dyson, who had grown up at Alfredton near Ballarat, took mining jobs at Ballarat, Clunes, Smeaton and Gordon in Victoria and Lefroy in Tasmania before finally moving to Melbourne where he was employed in his uncle's paper bag factory. In Heathcote in central Victoria, Thomas Purcell had seen the fateful day looming for years as his father's mining ventures grew less profitable and his friends departed, one by one, for the metropolis or other towns. 'I am making preparations to go to town to seek employment', he wrote in his diary just two days before his departure. In Melbourne he boarded with his sister and brother-in-law at Footscray, a western suburb popular among settlers from the goldfields, and took up the search for work. He called on his local members of parliament to see if they could find him a government billet. He tried several local factories, including the juteworks where his brother-in-law was employed, but without success. One of the circle of Irish Catholic families from Heathcote, the Kellys, eventually found him a job as a quarryman at the waterworks, and one of the Heathcote local members, Simon Fraser, an old political ally of his father's, used his influence to secure the labourer's job in the railway yards that he still occupied in 1888. By this time Purcell had become a stalwart of the local Catholic church, and as secretary of the Hibernian Catholic Benefit Society, he zealously maintained those networks of mutual aid that had smoothed his own migration to the metropolis.

## SOJOURNERS

The capital cities were not only powerful magnets for country youths; they were also the headquarters of great bureaucracies with tentacles that spread throughout the interior of the country. Prominent among the landmarks of the typical country town were banks, state schools, post offices, churches, railway stations and police stations erected by order of city officials and staffed by their emissaries. The power of local worthies, embodied in the mayor and councillors, was paralleled by the more impersonal authority wielded by representatives of the great world beyond—the bank manager, the schoolteacher, the policeman and the clergyman. These sojourners had been placed in the town by their superiors in the capital cities and would eventually move on when head office ordered them to do so.

When long-serving schoolteachers or popular bank managers took leave of their districts, the townsfolk often gathered to recognise their services and wish them well at the next posting. In the course of 1888 the people of Wodonga, Victoria, farewelled their postmaster, a relieving bank manager and the Presbyterian minister. The postmaster, who had also served as president of the Athenaeum or mechanics' institute, was presented with an illuminated address. The bank manager was treated to a 'social glass' and a program of songs and complimentary speeches at Bambrick's hotel. The Presbyterian minister's sendoff at the local state school was a staid affair though his farewell present, a purse of sovereigns, was more lavish.

The man who held the town's purse strings was in a position of great influence, and the bank manager was usually numbered among the local elite. Most bank employees had themselves come from families who could afford to supplement the young recruit's meagre stipend while he was on the way up. The Bank of New South Wales started its junior clerks on £25 a year—10s a week when a labourer earned 6s a day—yet it expected them to dress respectably and behave as young gentlemen. William Brooks, a Queensland parliamentarian, wondered why his bank clerk son could not live within his means. Mottram Brooks had been posted to Mareeba, on the northern mining frontier, where rent and food were exorbitant. When the father became aware of his son's financial plight he appealed to a friend at head office to relieve 'the predicament of young clerks', but to no



Parents' illuminated address to W.B. Attwood, head teacher, Kyneton South state school, Victoria.

KYNETON HISTORICAL MUSEUM



*Montague Selwyn Smith stands outside his branch of the Queensland National Bank at Beaudesert in southern Queensland. The horse was a necessity for a country bank manager, who needed to visit clients and appraise property in outlying areas. The dwelling on the right was presumably his residence.*

OXLEY LIBRARY



avail. Meanwhile, he advised his son to get by as best he could. The young man responded by moving out of the hotel he could not afford and into a house where he bached with a group of other young men. His descent from respectability so appalled his parents that they volunteered to pay him an allowance if only he moved back into the hotel.

Young bankers were the foot soldiers of the profession, at the disposal of head office to be moved wherever it required. Most banks required them to remain unmarried until they had attained a salary of £200, thus ensuring that their married employees lived respectably and that there were always enough movable bachelors to fill the lowest and most remote postings. It usually took between five and eight years to reach the magic £200, and only about one-third of the Bank of New South Wales's employees had reached it by their twenty-fifth birthday. Most waited until their late twenties and some postponed their wedding day until they had attained a managership (£375).

Despite their lowly beginnings most bank employees could expect eventually to enjoy a secure middle-class income. Two-thirds reached a salary of at least £325 and one-third rose to £500 or more. But financial security came at the cost of domestic disruption. In the course of his career, an employee of the Bank of New South Wales could expect to be moved about a dozen times. Some moved even more often—almost one-third were transferred more than twenty times and one thirty-seven times. Most of these moves, it is true, were concentrated in the first ten or twenty years. Alfred Thompson moved twenty-six times in his forty-two-year career, but twenty of these moves took place in his first ten years.

The comparative security of their later years led some old-timers to conclude that there had been a great improvement in the banker's lot. C.E. Preshaw, who had joined the Bank of New South Wales in 1855, painted a strong contrast between the hardships of his early postings on the goldfields and the pampered life of the modern bank clerk:

At the present time—1888—it may appear almost impossible to many that a bank agency should have been in a tent, that bankers should have, often on foot,



*From the Queensland National Bank in Queen Street, Brisbane, came the orders to move the bank's officers from town to town.*  
OXLEY LIBRARY

gone long distances to purchase gold from small storekeepers, the said gold often being carried on their backs till the security (?) of some rough bush shanty had been reached, that instead of cedar counters, massive ledgers, impregnable strong rooms and all the appliances of modern banking, a case to write on, a notebook or piece of wrapping paper and a saddle bag should have been quite the correct thing ... Truly the banker of the old digging days was different to that curled darling, Montmorenci Fitzjones, idol of the block and much invited out to Potts Point.

Yet even as Preshaw wrote, young W.E. Southernden was travelling the Queensland outback in a bullock dray, toiling inside a galvanised iron banking chamber in sweltering heat and subsisting on tinned meat, vegetables, butter and milk.

Head office encouraged bank officers to become involved in the community and the bank manager was often expected to serve as treasurer of the local hospital or racing club. The schoolmaster and the clergyman often took a similar part in the town's cultural life, acting as secretary of the mechanics' institute or dramatic society. When Southernden was posted to the Gympie bank his managerial talents were quickly put to use. 'I entered into everything in the way of sports', he recalled, 'being secretary of the principal cricket club, started the football club, played tennis, ran dance assemblies (winter) and annual sports meetings, and also played the organ when the church organist was absent'. A sociable banker not only attracted customers to the bank but heard a good deal of useful gossip about the financial affairs of the district. Yet propriety also required the banker, like the clergyman and the policeman, to maintain a discreet distance from the community. No matter how deeply he became involved in its affairs, he was never entirely *of* it. His ultimate loyalty was to his masters in the metropolis.

A move could convey either the approval or the censure of head office. Employees marked out for the highest posts moved more often than usual, making longer hops from place to place and bigger jumps up the promotion ladder. But a move could also mean that a man had lost the confidence of head office; the least successful employees, those who never attained a salary of £375, moved more

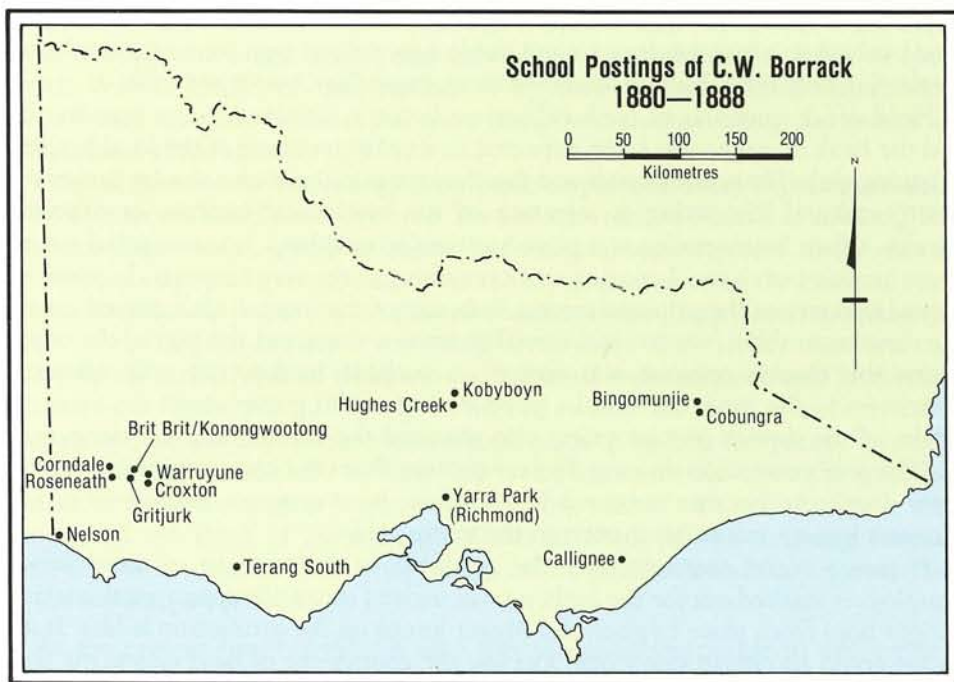
frequently than the rest. Through its visiting inspectors, head office received regular reports on the performance of faraway servants, which it constantly matched against new vacancies. 'I am ... carefully watching him', wrote John Sawers, superintendent of the Bank of Australasia, of his popular manager in Orange, 'and if I find him to be dangerously sanguine he shall certainly be removed'. A banker must be 'popular' yet never found in the company of 'men who are not fitting'; 'genial' yet not 'too lenient'. Any deviation from this narrow path, and he could find himself making an unwelcome journey.

State schoolteachers had a lower, but still respectable, position in small-town society. Most were recruited from the lower middle and respectable working classes and had begun in their teens as pupil teachers, learning their trade by a mixture of formal tuition and practical experience and climbing by a process of examination and inspection. Their starting salaries as pupil teacher were only a shade higher than bank clerks'—£25 rising to £44 per annum for a male in New South Wales; £80 in Victoria, with women at about two-thirds of the male rate. Most necessarily lived with their parents for the first year or two. Thereafter young teachers, like young bankers, usually led a wandering life. When twenty-three-year-old C.W. Borrack took up a position at Terang South in western Victoria, he had already been transferred eleven times and had served in sixteen different schools in almost every part of the colony.

Borrack, a Ballarat boy, had begun his teaching career in 1884, amid the 'wild, rugged and picturesque' scenery of Buckland Upper in the remote northeast. In 1885 he was transferred to Calignee in south Gippsland. Arriving at the beginning of winter, he was at first appalled by the muddy roads, the lack of maps and copy books and the backwardness of his pupils. But as the weeks passed he became reconciled to the place. The fishing was good and the sons of the local farmers, with whom he went shooting, were 'nice and agreeable'. No sooner had he begun to settle in, however, than orders arrived from Melbourne sending him 500 kilometres west to Nelson on the South Australian border. Seven weeks later he

*Charles Borrack's postings as a student teacher took him from one end of Victoria to the other, never staying anywhere for more than a month or two, until he received his first permanent posting at Terang South in 1887.*

GARY SWINTON





*The sole teacher of the Inglewood state school, Victoria, with his class.*  
NATIONAL LIBRARY

was again on the move, this time to take charge of a pair of small rural schools near Hamilton. Here he first encountered that *bête noire* of young teachers, the district inspector, 'as bald as a bladder o' lard and . . . as dry as a bone in his talking, which is mostly of his daughters' ability and his collection of fossils!' Then he was off again to Gritjurk and Brit Brit.

The beginning of the 1886 school year found him journeying by train, steamer and buggy to Cobungra West, high in the Victorian Alps. The schoolhouse, he discovered, was 'a worn out affair' furnished with only a slab table, forms and an open fireplace, while the people were even more antiquated than the buildings. With only a bed of sticks to sleep on, he was glad when the order came to move on to Kobynboyn and Hughes Creek schools in central Victoria. Here he stayed for a whole six months until, in 1887, he gained his first truly permanent appointment at Terang South.

Borrack, an adventure-loving bachelor with a passion for outdoor sports, took all these changes in his stride. He found it exhilarating to be sitting on the top of Mount Buffalo one month and boarding a steamer bound for Geelong the next. Each new posting brought new opportunities for learning and leisure. At Buckland Upper he sang, played cricket and hiked. Even at lonely Calignee he passed the time pleasantly enough, shooting lyrebirds and other native animals. Being the schoolmaster gave him easy entry into local society. At Buckland Upper, where educated folk were few, he consorted with 'notable women', while the Presbyterian squatters of the Western District, anxious for their children's education, also made him feel 'important'.

But the roving life that Borrack found so appealing became irksome to middle-aged family men. Halfway through 1888 James Anderson was transferred from Lake Rowan near Benalla to Foster in south Gippsland. The Andersons had been eleven years at Lake Rowan, and around their tidy little education department cottage they had established a small orchard and extensive vegetable gardens. When he arrived in Foster, at the end of a long journey by train, ship and horse, Anderson was devastated to find that the town had neither a school residence nor any other decent rentable accommodation. He was forced to put up at the local pub and leave his wife and family behind in a lodging house in Melbourne. Was this fair treatment after all his years of faithful service? he asked.

When, where and how often a teacher moved depended on his ambition, examination results and the verdict of the district inspector. A man who joined the New South Wales teaching service and stayed for twenty years or more could expect to move six or seven times and eventually reach a salary of about £300. But there was room for only a few to go higher. In the same time a long-serving school mistress would have moved four or five times and would barely have attained a salary of £200. Her advancement was limited from the outset by the lack of suitable residential accommodation in rural areas and by the restriction of most appointments in one-teacher schools to male teachers. Many women also preferred, for economic and domestic reasons, to stay in the same locality, even though it harmed their prospects of promotion.

In theory a teacher or a bank clerk could be moved from one end of the colony to the other; in practice the majority of ordinary, competent men and women spent long stretches of their careers in the same part of the country. Some gained the reputation of being 'city' or 'country' types, and it was not uncommon for promotions to be refused when they would entail too painful an uprooting. Heartless and impersonal though they often seemed, the men at head office also knew how much local loyalties contributed to the cheerful service of the man or woman in the field.

For teachers and bank clerks, moving on often meant getting on; but for many more lowly paid sojourners, such as stationmasters and policemen, the opportunities for promotion were very limited. In the age of steam, the stationmaster's was a glamorous and responsible job. The starting pay was better than for teachers or bankers (£140 per annum on the New South Wales Railways); but since most recruits were over twenty-five years old and had often worked for some time in a subordinate railway job either in the colonies or in Britain, the pay alone cannot have attracted them. Only the few stationmasters who were promoted to a second-class station (about £300 a year) were as well off as the majority of long-serving teachers. Having obtained the job, many showed no inclination to move, apparently being content, so to speak, with their station. Those who did move changed jobs about as often as teachers, but many gained a change of scene without much increase in pay. The typical pattern, which closely paralleled the movement of teachers and bankers, was for stationmasters to move backwards and forwards along the same trunk line and within the same region.

When the Victorian government sought fifty recruits for the police force in 1888 it was surprised to be deluged with over five hundred applications. The chief secretary, Alfred Deakin, 'presumed the inducements were permanent employment, the prospects of advancement and perhaps also the uniform'. Yet the material rewards and promotion prospects of Victorian policemen were much poorer than for other public servants. The recruits started on 6s 6d a day (£100 per annum), not much better than labourer's pay. There were compensations, to be sure. Family men posted to the country enjoyed a police residence and on retirement they received a police pension. But in contrast to the assured promotion prospects of schoolteachers and bank clerks, most eager young constables were destined, by the very structure of the force, to become grumbling middle-aged constables.

The policeman's path to promotion was strewn with many obstacles. Illness, insubordination, drunkenness and incompetence disqualified some from the race. No longer were men selected or relegated because of their Catholic or Orange loyalties or because they were too lenient or too vigilant towards the local publican. To become a sergeant, a policeman had now to pass a formal examination in arithmetic, English and law. But successful examinees far outnumbered vacancies. In practice, seniority and the approval of the senior officers counted more than

examination results. Efficient policemen consigned to distant one-man stations in the Wimmera or the wilds of Gippsland complained that their crime-fighting exploits were apt to go unnoticed by superiors at Russell Street. Samuel Mooney, stationed at Great Western near Stawell, had kept the peace faithfully for over a decade without ever catching the eye of his senior officers. At last he could stand it no longer. 'I complain that men, years junior to me and whose claims do not appear to be at all exceptional have been promoted over my head', he wrote. Had he not broken up a gang of notorious thieves in 1882? And although he had once been accused of losing a flock of sheep from the police paddock, a senior officer had exonerated him. Mooney's plea was successful. In 1888 he was promoted at last to head the station at Murtoa. But the fifty new recruits who joined him in the force in that year must have been attracted less than Alfred Deakin presumed by 'the prospects of advancement', and more by the secure, if lowly, pay and the shortlived glamour of their smart new uniforms.

### TRAVELLERS

For children in Deniliquin, New South Wales, the great event of 1888 was the arrival of St Leon's Grand Circus. Headed by the circus band and escorted by crowds of excited youths, the 800-metre procession of horses, brightly painted wagons, acrobats and clowns swelled spectacularly the usual trickle of travellers passing through the town. When the big top went up, 400 locals, a quarter of them small boys, turned out to watch a program of performing horses ('the best that have ever travelled the Australian colonies'), bareback riding, acrobatics, juggling and clowning. The gipsy glamour of the circus people and their mastery of the rural skills of animal training and horsemanship strongly appealed to bush folk isolated from the theatres and music halls of the metropolis.

Like most Australian circuses, St Leon's had begun in the bush, and many of its exotically named performers, including a number of Aborigines masquerading as 'Indians' and 'Arabs', were products of the outback. Many circuses worked a particular region of the country. In 1888 Australia's oldest circus, Ashton's, played the Darling Downs; Fitzgerald's travelled the far outback around Gunnedah and Bourke; Charles 'Jubilee' Perry's roamed the backblocks of Queensland and New South Wales, while Wirth's, which had begun in the Riverina, was filling the gap left by a succession of travelling American circuses in Sydney. St Leon's was among the most up-to-date and widely travelled of local shows—the first to travel by rail and the first to include caged animals in its program. In outback areas, however, it usually travelled by road and left the wild animals behind. It had begun the year in the far north of Queensland, near Normanton, and travelled south into New South Wales, arriving at Deniliquin via Tallangatta, Albury and Tocumwal before continuing through Broken Hill to Port Pirie, Port Augusta and Adelaide.

Circus people were the most colourful representatives of a distinct class of mobile Australians: the travellers. In between moves, sojourners lived a comparatively sedentary life. They had temporary homes and were regarded as part of the community. But although travellers had more-or-less permanent jobs, their work kept them permanently on the move. Sometimes, perhaps in the metropolis or a country town, there was a place the traveller considered home, where a family waited, but for most of the year the traveller was in a state of perpetual motion, welcomed in many places but belonging in none.

Travellers supplied small and isolated settlements with those goods and services for which the local demand was either too small or too intermittent to justify a fulltime local business. The arrival of the travelling photographer, quack medicine

CIRCUS.	CIRCUS.	CIRCUS.	CIRCUS.
CIRCUS	WIRTH'S	CIRCUS	CIRCUS
CIRCUS	GRAND CIRCUS	CIRCUS	CIRCUS
CIRCUS	and	CIRCUS	CIRCUS
CIRCUS	NEW YORK	CIRCUS	CIRCUS
CIRCUS	EQUESTRIENCLUM.	CIRCUS	CIRCUS
CIRCUS	The largest, best, and most	CIRCUS	CIRCUS
CIRCUS	ORIGINAL CIRCUS	CIRCUS	CIRCUS
CIRCUS	in the	CIRCUS	CIRCUS
CIRCUS	Australian Colonies.	CIRCUS	CIRCUS
CIRCUS	FIRST APPEARANCE	CIRCUS	CIRCUS
CIRCUS	in SYDNEY	CIRCUS	CIRCUS
CIRCUS	of the Latest and Most Gigantic	CIRCUS	CIRCUS
CIRCUS	Enterprise of the WIRTH BROS.,	CIRCUS	CIRCUS
CIRCUS	on the	CIRCUS	CIRCUS
CIRCUS	HAYMARKET SQUARE.	CIRCUS	CIRCUS
CIRCUS	GRAND OPENING NIGHT.	CIRCUS	CIRCUS
CIRCUS	THURSDAY, 26th MAY, 1888.	CIRCUS	CIRCUS
CIRCUS	(Queen's Birthday).	CIRCUS	CIRCUS
CIRCUS	EVERY FACE NEW.	CIRCUS	CIRCUS
CIRCUS	Four Beautiful and Accomplished Lady	CIRCUS	CIRCUS
CIRCUS	Equestriennes.	CIRCUS	CIRCUS
CIRCUS	20 Male and Female Artists.	CIRCUS	CIRCUS
CIRCUS	The foremost in the Profession.	CIRCUS	CIRCUS
CIRCUS	32 highly-trained Horses and Ponies.	CIRCUS	CIRCUS
CIRCUS	The Wonderful Wirth Family.	CIRCUS	CIRCUS
CIRCUS	15 in number, 15.	CIRCUS	CIRCUS
CIRCUS	from Renz Circus, Berlin. The most	CIRCUS	CIRCUS
CIRCUS	talented and versatile	CIRCUS	CIRCUS
CIRCUS	All round Circus Performers that have ever	CIRCUS	CIRCUS
CIRCUS	Graced the Arena in Australia.	CIRCUS	CIRCUS
CIRCUS	MISS MARIZES WIRTH	CIRCUS	CIRCUS
CIRCUS	on the	CIRCUS	CIRCUS
CIRCUS	HIGH INVISIBLE WIRE.	CIRCUS	CIRCUS
CIRCUS	introducing her bevy of beautiful	CIRCUS	CIRCUS
CIRCUS	FIGONS.	CIRCUS	CIRCUS
CIRCUS	The prettiest set ever seen in any Circus.	CIRCUS	CIRCUS
CIRCUS	OUR LILLIPUTIAN TROUPE,	CIRCUS	CIRCUS
CIRCUS	3 in number 5.	CIRCUS	CIRCUS
CIRCUS	The smallest	CIRCUS	CIRCUS
CIRCUS	and	CIRCUS	CIRCUS
CIRCUS	MOST FINISHED ARTISTS EXTANT.	CIRCUS	CIRCUS
CIRCUS	THE WORLD-RENOVED	CIRCUS	CIRCUS
CIRCUS	WALHALLA BROS.	CIRCUS	CIRCUS
CIRCUS	ROLEX AND FELO.	CIRCUS	CIRCUS
CIRCUS	the two	CIRCUS	CIRCUS
CIRCUS	GREAT MUSICAL CLOWNS,	CIRCUS	CIRCUS
CIRCUS	from	CIRCUS	CIRCUS
CIRCUS	SANOER'S CIRCUS,	CIRCUS	CIRCUS
CIRCUS	England.	CIRCUS	CIRCUS
CIRCUS	Further particulars of this UNIQUE SHOW	CIRCUS	CIRCUS
CIRCUS	see bills and future advertisements.	CIRCUS	CIRCUS
CIRCUS	ALEXANDER,	CIRCUS	CIRCUS
CIRCUS	Business Manager.	CIRCUS	CIRCUS

Advertisement for Wirth's circus, Sydney, May 1888. COLLECTION OF J.T. FOGARTY

seller, dentist, piano tuner or entertainer gave the community an opportunity to be relieved of its stored-up vanity, lumbago, toothache, musical discord or boredom. The traveller was the broker between two worlds. Sojourners were the ambassadors of the great world to the little community; travellers were its couriers. The commercial traveller, the pedlar, the travelling lecturer, showman or evangelist, the bank or school inspector brought word of the mighty political, social and technological changes occurring at the other end of the railway and the telegraph line. The railways had brought the bush closer to the city, so helping, perhaps, to popularise bush ideals of mateship among city folk. But they also encouraged an even stronger movement in the opposite direction as travellers took the goods, fashions and ideas of the metropolis to the outback.

Circuses were the biggest of several troupes of entertainers travelling the Australian countryside in 1888. Hamilton, a prosperous town in western Victoria, welcomed the Fisk Jubilee Singers, a black-faced minstrel group, Valentine's Royal Variety Minstrel and Burlesque Company and the Sydney Dramatic Company, before the arrival of St Leon's circus on its way back from Adelaide at the end of the year. In between passed a constant flow of one-man and one-woman shows, including Emilie Melville, 'the Queen of Opera Bouffe' and Professor Rice, 'the only actual mind-reader on the face of the earth'. A celebrity with passable oratorical skills could clean up a small fortune from a lecture tour of the colonies. One of the most successful, the veteran London journalist George Sala, who barnstormed the outback in 1885, described the unaccustomed hardships of

having to tumble out of bed in the dark at 6 a.m., travel all day, arrive in a lecturing town (often only a few hovels in the bush) at 7 p.m. and with nothing more in the way of refreshment than three raw eggs beaten up in a glass of sherry, stand in a barn lighted by kerosene lamps, and talk for two mortal hours.

The most popular travelling lecturer of 1888, Miss Lydia von Finkelstein, was the daughter of a Russian exile reared in Jerusalem whose lectures on the arts and cultures of Palestine, delivered in flamboyant oriental attire and with a strong emphasis on biblical themes, relieved the tedium, while reinforcing the evangelical piety, of her small-town audiences.

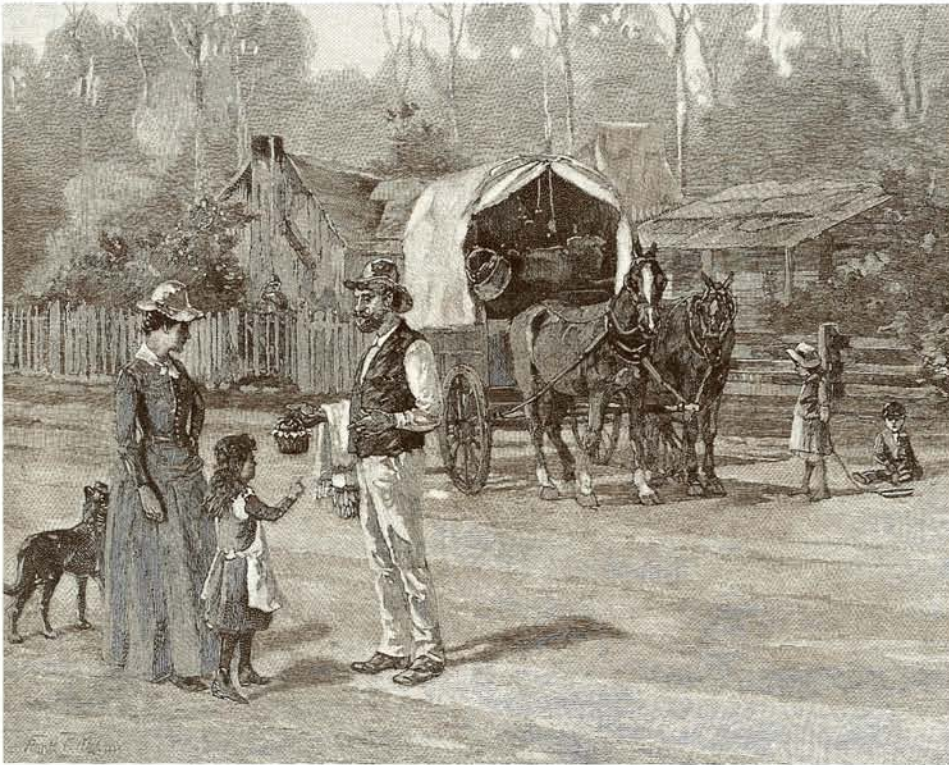
From star performers like Sala and von Finkelstein, the range of travelling entertainers descended into the larger class of vagrants and semibeggars who occasionally sang or played for their supper. When the police caught up with fourteen-year-old Guisepppe and ten-year-old Carlo Lotierzo, who had run away from their employer and guardian in Melbourne, they were busking in the streets of Horsham.

In the fantasy world of the circus or the theatre, the dark-skinned or oriental artist was a popular attraction. But the same decent provincial Australians who applauded the performance of the Arab horseman or the Chinese juggler became nervous when an Indian hawker or Chinese vegetable seller appeared at their back doors. More than two hundred Afghan and Indian traders drove their canvas-covered carts through the Victorian countryside, selling drapery, clothes and assorted household items, mainly to housewives in small towns and farms. They usually followed a two- or three-monthly itinerary, then returned to the capital city or to a large inland town where they picked up fresh supplies and joined other hawkers for a kind of jamboree. Like the Chinese vegetable sellers who traded from door to door in the suburbs, the Indian traders were regarded with a mixture of gratitude and suspicion. As suppliers of cheap merchandise, their arrival was often welcomed by farm wives unable to get to town. But local shopkeepers resented their keen competition and the persistent but unconfirmed rumours that

*Lydia Mamveoff von Finkelstein, born in Palestine of Russian parentage, was a leading attraction on the Australian lecture circuit in 1888.*

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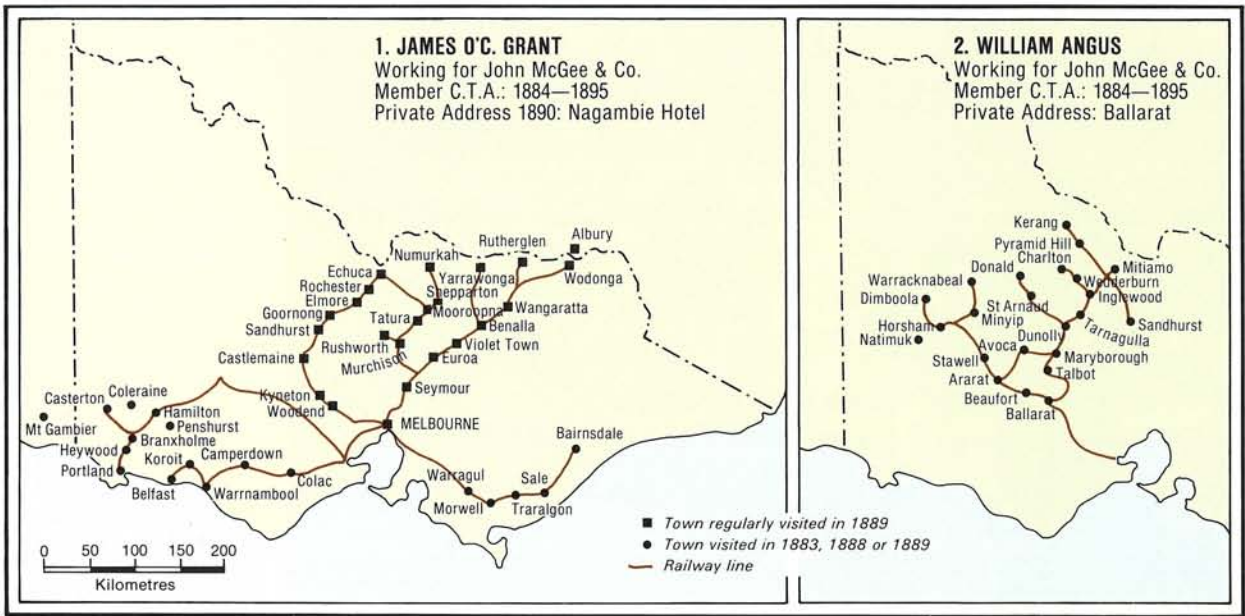
A bush hawker, by Frank Mahony, one of several scenes of typical Australian life executed by the Melbourne-born artist for the Picturesque atlas of Australasia. Since the 1860s the hawker's wagon, with its pair of horses and sailcloth hood, had been a familiar sight in outback areas. By the late 1880s the Jewish merchants who had once dominated the trade were gradually being replaced by Indians and Afghans. A. Garran (ed), Picturesque atlas of Australasia, Sydney 1886–88.

Indian traders had attacked or seduced farmers' wives caused many landowners to expel them as trespassers.

A more reassuring figure was the commercial traveller. Sent by city merchants, agents and manufacturers to sell their wares in up-country districts, he was readily identified in railway waiting rooms and hotel saloons by his smart dress, bulging sample bags and affable manner. The coming of the railways had greatly eased and shortened the journeys of commercial travellers. Old hands could still look back to 'those good old days when railways were not ... [and] it was a common thing for a man to be out on a three months' trip'. The arrival of the traveller in a splendid buggy pulled by a pair of spirited horses was then a great event in the life of a country town. Nowadays, though, most travellers seldom needed to be away from home for more than a week or two, although in remote areas, where the railway had yet to penetrate, his absences might be longer. A voyager on the steamer to Cairns noticed that his fellow passengers consisted largely of 'commercial travellers, young men, fast and furious, representing houses in the home country, as well as Melbourne and Sydney'. Their appearance so far from home, he thought, was yet another sign that 'this is the century of progress and competition, cheap travelling and expedition'. Unlike the Indian merchant who stole trade from local businesses, the commercial traveller was welcomed as a harbinger of prosperity. One resident of Parkes even thought that the state of local trade could be gauged by the number of commercial travellers in town.

Almost every town in Victoria now lay within a day's rail journey of Melbourne. Most commercial travellers kept permanent homes in the metropolis, especially in the fashionable businessmen's suburbs of St Kilda, South Yarra, Prahran and Hawthorn, or in the larger provincial cities. The three travellers employed by John McGee and Co, a firm of Melbourne wine and spirit merchants, were each allocated a particular segment of the colony, divided according to the spokes of the





*Routes of commercial travellers for John McGee and Company, Melbourne, 1884–89.*

MARY LOU HORNE

radial railway network. William Angus, who travelled the northwest of the colony, lived with his family in Ballarat and made weekly expeditions out and back along the railway to Dunolly and Maryborough, Beaufort and Stawell, Inglewood, Kerang and Pyramid Hill. James Grant, on the other hand, was based in Melbourne and made more extended monthly trips to the towns of north-central and northeast Victoria.

By 1888 the commercial travellers were becoming a well-organised, self-conscious profession with their own Commercial Travellers' Association club-rooms in Sydney and Melbourne and a network of CTA-approved hotels throughout the country, particularly along the main railway routes. A small minority, perhaps one in ten, owned their own businesses; others were relatives or junior employees serving a turn on the road while they worked their way up in the firm. Most, however, were specialist salesmen who expected to stay on the road throughout their working lives, their earnings set usually by a combination of salary and commission. Sometimes a traveller would move from firm to firm or rise to a higher managerial position, but most remained with the same employer for most of their working lives.

The ideal member of the profession, according to the Victorian CTA's journal the *Traveller*, was distinguished by his push, tact, pleasing address, thorough knowledge of his wares and customers, patience, education, temperance and knowledge of human nature. He was, above all, a gentleman. 'Don't make a mistake', the *Traveller* insisted; 'free and easy manners are tolerated, but the manners of a gentleman are a sure passport to success'. His social skills were probably more important than his specialised knowledge of the line in which he travelled. It was important for a traveller to be

... spoken of as a 'good fellow' whom the general public are always glad to meet in the train or hotel, a man who always puts you at your ease, can converse intelligently on many topics and if the conversation flags can revive it with a 'yarn' that you may be sure is not 'stale' (that would be a slip which he would consider unpardonable); and when the smoking room is resorted to, who is looked to for the first song? the traveller again, and usually gives a good song too.

Commercial travelling was among the most sociable, yet also among the most solitary, of professions. Travellers shared a common way of life yet, except for an occasional evening in the bar or billiard room of the CTA's city headquarters, their paths seldom crossed. To counter the isolation of their everyday lives, the CTA encouraged a sense of companionship and co-operation among 'the Brethren of the Road'. Melbourne's commercial travellers had their own masonic lodge, the Washington Lodge no 9, and the rituals of freemasonry became a kind of *lingua franca* between 'the grippers', as they were known, and their colleagues and customers. In a profession distinguished by transiency and slick talk, the mason's handshake seemed to establish a more durable moral bond.

In 1888 a new kind of traveller was appearing in the railway waiting rooms and pubs of the outback. Just as shearing was getting under way in the far west, a detachment of the Salvation Army under the command of Major Barritt travelled up the railway from Sydney through Dubbo to reinforce the Army's embattled legions in Bourke. The assault on 'Beelzebub's Kingdom' had faltered in the preceding weeks. The Army's meetings in the local hall had been invaded by stamping roughs, and when Captain Miller, its representative, took the offenders to court, the magistrate threw out the charges 'on the ground that the mere stamping of feet by the accused could not have disturbed the usually noisy service of the Army'. To make matters worse, the council was threatening to ban Salvationists' street processions because their torches and music frightened the bush horses.

Yet when Major Barritt's Salvation Songsters held their first meeting, the hall could barely fit in the crowd of enthusiastic sixpenny ticket holders. The audience had to be asked to hold back their appreciation till the proper time, when the hats were sent round for the collection. The townsfolk evidently enjoyed the sweet harmonies of the Hallelujah lasses and adjutant Veal's 'dexterous manipulation of the violin'. But how much did they absorb of the Army's religious message? A 'mechanical' religion, like the Salvation Army, had its appeal for 'the lower scale' of city dwellers, the editor of the *Western Mail* conceded. Whether it was suited to 'small bush towns' remained to be seen. Sydney might send up sellers of the latest fashions, in religion as in dress or entertainment, but bush folk would take or leave them, just as they pleased.



A Salvation Army 'cavalry fort'. The first expeditionary forces of Salvationists had relied on local farmers for transport from the railway stations to outlying farms and villages. By the end of 1887, as their evangelistic work expanded and farmers busied themselves with the coming harvest, the Army had appealed to its supporters to supply horses and a carriage for this 'cavalry fort', the first of several to travel the country areas of Victoria and New South Wales. War Cry.

## NOMADS

Jack Mitchell, swagman and bush philosopher, cut a strange figure amid the bustling crowds of commuters on Redfern station. Dressed in a ragged shirt, patched moleskins and a battered green hat, humping a swag and leading his dog on a chain, he had arrived straight from the outback aboard the western train. As he left the station he was accosted by a cabman. 'Now, do I look as if I wanted a cab?' the bushman enquired. 'I've tramped two thousand miles since last Chris'mas, and I don't see why I can't tramp the last mile.'

The coming of the railway shrank the distance between Sydney and the bush and threw the differences between country and city ways into sharp relief. Bushmen could now travel, as Mitchell did, from the far outback to the heart of the city in a matter of hours, while the city unemployed could be dispersed by means of government rail passes to the farthest corners of the colony. Nomadic pastoral workers and shearers still tramped from property to property through the inland corridor, but their weeks of dawdling on the track were now interspersed with days rattling across the country in second-class railway compartments. Yet railways were an expensive form of transport and their radial routes centred in the capital cities catered for only a fraction of the complex, cross-country movements of the nomad tribe of bush workers.

Through most of the year the labour requirements of Australia's inland regions were relatively small. But during the few short months of shearing and harvesting they rose steeply, often pushing and pulling labourers great distances across the country. Some of these nomads came from the cities, where they spent the off-seasons working in factories or on the wharves. Some were locals taking a spell from jobs in nearby towns or mining areas. Some were long-distance nomads who travelled round the year from one end of the inland corridor, and even from one side of the Tasman, to the other.

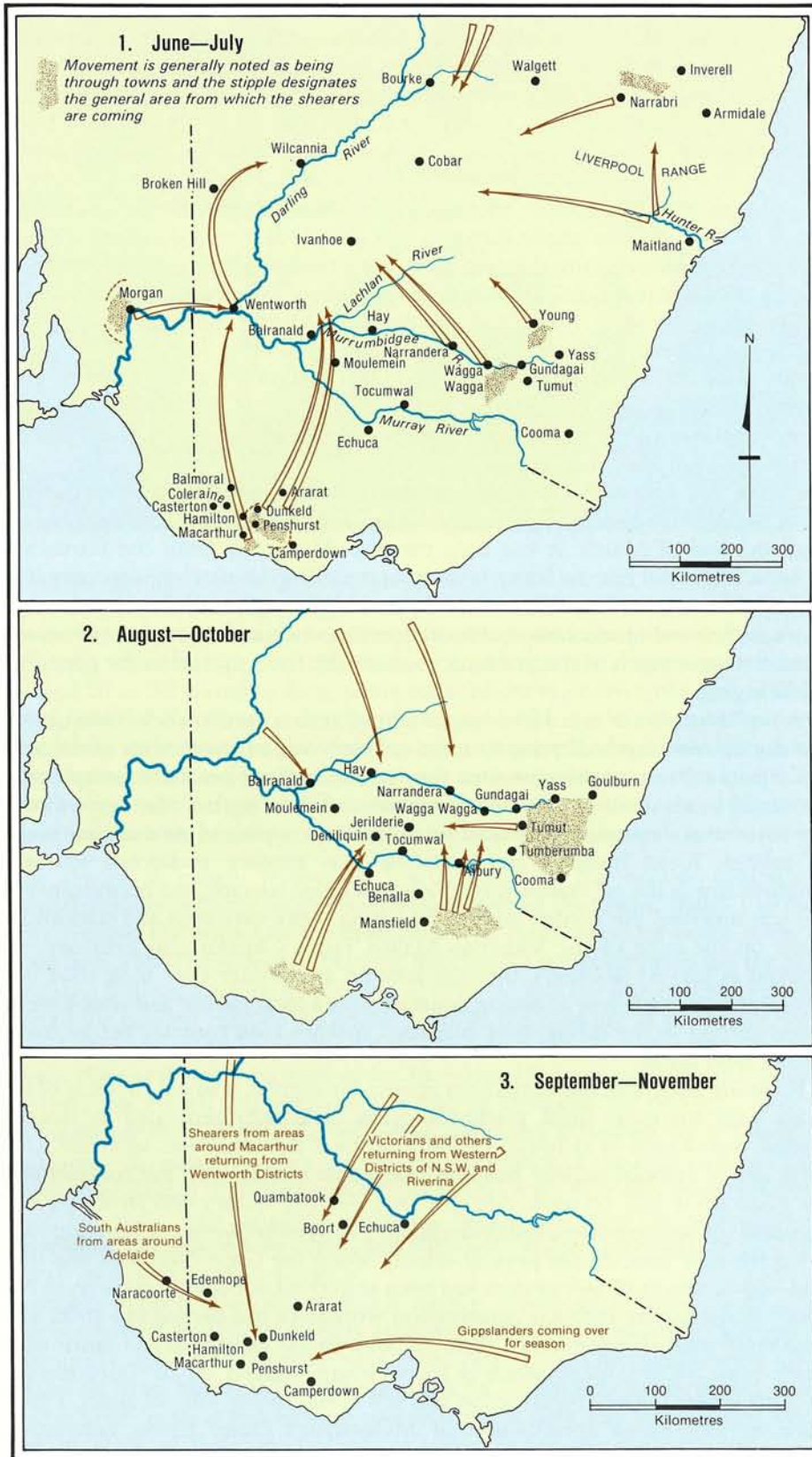
The biggest movements were those generated by the annual cycle of the wool industry (described in chapter 8). As spring approached, shearing began on the great inland stations of southern Queensland and through July and August it advanced south and east through the open grasslands of western New South Wales. By September the shearers gathered outside the great woolsheds of the Riverina, and in November the season was at its peak in Victoria's Western District. In the higher, colder country of the southern highlands and in the midlands of Tasmania, however, the last of the flocks had not been shorn until December or January. Long-distance movements and professional, year-round shearers were the rule in the far outback; in the more closely settled coastal regions, where stations were interspersed with farms, mines and small towns, they were outnumbered by local part-time shearers.

Other rural industries, following their own cycles of production, created smaller peaks of activity that sometimes meshed and sometimes clashed with the climax of the pastoral year. Wheat harvesting, cane cutting, potato digging, maize harvesting, hop picking and fruit picking all made some call on outside labour and stimulated smaller and more localised migrations. In northern New South Wales, for example, the cane cutting season, which peaked in June, came before the height of shearing activity in July and August. In the Riverina, on the other hand, wheat harvesting coincided with the shearing season, so accentuating the local demand for labour and the inward flow of labourers.

At the peak of the agricultural year, when the local labour market was at full stretch, many other routine activities had to be suspended. As the teams of professional shearers passed through towns on their way to the sheds, they found



Swagman.  
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Seasonal movements of shearers  
 GARY SWINTON

many businesses closed or on short time. Teachers noticed their classes thinning as children followed their parents on to the stations and farms to work as rouseabouts, hop pickers and harvesters. Road contractors, dam builders and other local employers scaled down their operations until the labourers returned. Advancing from north to south and from the interior to the coast, the yearly climax of activity swept through town after town and station after station. In Bourke, plenty of labour was available until May but by July most of the locals had departed for the Queensland shearing, leaving the local labour market tight. By the end of June many road contractors in the Riverina had already had to abandon work in the face of the exodus to the shearing sheds, and road work in Coonabarabran and Forbes ceased at about the same time. The schools in Tamworth and Forbes closed down from October to the end of the year. 'Father away shearing' was the explanation recorded against the names of some pupils who had failed to pay their school fees. By November, wool washing, haymaking and harvesting were emptying schoolrooms in the southern Riverina, while the peak of harvesting along the western slopes and in the Wimmera ran through the traditional Christmas break and into February.

By the end of summer, however, the demand for agricultural labour rapidly fell away everywhere except in the fruit growing districts, where it continued strongly until the end of March. It was then that the Aborigines from the Ramahyuck Mission Station in eastern Victoria went hop picking on nearby properties. Their natural dexterity and quickness earned them high wages, and the opportunity to work at their own pace, camp outdoors, spend money and enjoy themselves away from the supervision of the missionaries made this short excursion the great event of their year.

After March the demand for seasonal labour in the countryside subsided, but did not dry up completely. During autumn and early winter, pastoralists often carried out repairs and maintenance on their properties. On Barrellan station, employment for casual hands declined after the completion of shearing but rose again through late autumn as the manager repaired his fences, sank wells and tried to clear his land of rabbits. Road building and mending was another traditional source of employment in the off season. John Nielson, a failed selector, and his sixteen-year-old son survived the winter months by taking work on farms and stations near Nhill on the edge of the Victorian Mallee. From Christmas to February, they worked as harvest labourers; through autumn and winter they took road work with the local council or a fencing contract with a local farmer and after a spell of wood cutting in the spring, they managed another road contract before harvest came round again.

Running alongside, and sometimes against, the regular, seasonal rhythms of rural work were the more fitful, manmade cycles of activity generated by developmental works such as railways, building projects and irrigation schemes. As the great age of colonial railway building reached its climax with the completion of the main trunk link between Adelaide, Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane, many thousands of hard-muscled, rough-living men moved between construction camps along the new lines. At the peak of activity along the Great Northern line in the mid-1880s, almost 10 000 navvies had been employed in building railways in New South Wales but by 1888 the construction workforce had declined to 1606. Some who were paid off returned to their old jobs on the canefields and farms of the north coast; others, more attached to navvying, moved on to Queensland or Victoria where railway construction was still in full swing. John Monash, a young engineer supervising construction of Melbourne's Outer Circle railway, was baffled by the navvies' unaccountable comings and goings. They arrived, he wrote,



*A gang of fettlers on the Ipswich–Toowoomba line in southern Queensland take a tea break. Their moleskin trousers, canvas leggings, flannel tunics and wide-brimmed hats were standard bush labourer's attire. The four-wheeled repair truck on which they sit was used in conjunction with the manually powered trike or trolley, one wheel of which is just visible on the right.*

OXLEY LIBRARY

from no one knows where like crows around a carcase, and when the work is over they vanish as mysteriously. Every man has one or more 'mates' and they travel, work, spree and fight together. The contractor cares little what becomes of a man when he is paid off. However, a popular ganger always knows where to find 20 or 30 favourite men. Some men follow their favourite ganger from job to job . . . Navvies are generally restless and when work is plentiful go from one job to another out of pure caprice. In the country he might when contracts were scarce turn farm hand (at smaller pay), miner, perhaps shearer, wood feller. But he generally travels with his whole household long distances to get work on contracts with better pay. At best his existence is precarious.

The camps of rough, womenless men created by the railway contractors coexisted uneasily with the more respectable society of the towns. 'Banjo' Paterson vividly recalled the impact of the great Southern Railway on his home town of Illalong near Yass. The sounds of blasting, the clang of temporary rails and the yells of drunken fettlers, gangers, drivers and navvies outside the pub on Friday nights shattered the pastoral calm of the countryside. 'In the blinking of an eye we were civilized', he remarked ironically. With plenty of money and inclination for pleasure, the navvies were a magnet for bare-knuckle fighters, music hall singers and prostitutes. Hotels and grog shops sprang up alongside the camps to cater to their legendary thirst, and in the wild days and nights following the contractors' monthly pay day many a navvy enjoyed the hospitality of the local lock-up. John Monash thought that the 'sober, industrious navvy' was a very rare specimen. Nine out of ten were 'raw ignorant Irishmen, strong and muscular, intemperate, improvident, unclean to look upon, and with not a thought beyond the day, and the very narrowest possible horizon'.

Itinerant workers generally travelled farthest where settlement was thinnest. The fencers, well diggers, tradesmen, rabbiters and road menders who opened up the company stations of western New South Wales and Queensland were often working far from home. William Spittles left his family at home in Forbes while he carried out splitting and fencing contracts about sixty kilometres away. Many of the menfolk of Bega worked out of town on fencing contracts during the

winter while children in Casino were often excused the payment of school fees because their fathers were up-country cutting timber.

But while some workers travelled far, most rural labourers were locals. Half of the men employed on casual work at Barellan station were on the local electoral roll, as were 40 per cent of the shearers. Public servants in Sydney, anxious to rid the city of its surplus unemployed, made regular enquiries about the demand for labour up-country. Invariably they were told that there were more than enough locals to meet the need. The road gangs around Lismore consisted largely of cane cutters in the off seasons, while in the Riverina the wheat harvesters were given preference in any local contracting. Pastoralists generally preferred to give shearing and station work to locals, or at least to men who had been recommended to them. A bushman's life was a dead end, remarked the jackeroo William Webb, 'unless you have some good influence at your back to push you'. Even when a labourer was forced beyond his immediate locality he generally stayed within the same natural geographical region. When the labourer Robert Graham was declared a bankrupt in 1888, the list of debts revealed his movements from Narrabri (1884) through Armidale (1885), Tamworth, Currabubula and Ironbark (1886) and back via Narrabri and Gunnedah (1887) to Boggabri (1888). Hounded by creditors, Graham was constantly on the move, but none of his travels took him outside the New England tablelands and the nearer western slopes.

Among the minority of long-distance travellers was that lonely tribe of rogues, runaways and rolling stones who wandered by choice. Disowned by their families or fleeing the ghosts of their past, they preferred the anonymity and easy-going tolerance of life on the road. Some fugitives had fled halfway round the world before going missing once again in Australia. George Morrison, a Scottish butcher of 'unsteady habits and roving disposition', spent several years in the Lancashire and Shanghai police forces and worked in a Hong Kong sugar refinery before turning up in Melbourne, only to disappear again. 'Maori Dick' Scott, bigamously married to a Melbourne woman, was last heard of driving a mob of sheep from Wilcannia. Edward Howells, another of the regular inflow of trans-Tasman travellers, arrived in 1884 for the Queensland shearing and then mysteriously disappeared. Like other

*New South Wales government survey camp. The surveyor and his assistants, in gentlemen's attire, are surrounded by their retinue of chainmen, cook and general hands. 'The life of a trig surveyer is lonely but fraught with many thrills', according to one of them, O'Malley Wood. 'He is rarely in any place for more than a month. Consequently there is little opportunity for social intercourse.'*

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Down on his luck, by Nicholas Caire, and Frederick McCubbin. As unemployment increased in several colonies in the late 1880s, the bushman down on his luck became a more familiar figure in art as in life. Frederick McCubbin's oil painting *Down on his luck* owes its inspiration partly to the evocative photographic study by Nicholas Caire.

ART GALLERY OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA; LA TROBE LIBRARY

crack professional shearers, Howells moved constantly from shed to shed and colony to colony, earning big money that he freely spent on horse racing and gambling, and was a hard man to track down. Rumour said that he had committed suicide somewhere in New South Wales over an unhappy love affair.

Whether as a cause or consequence of their roving and insecure lives, many other bush labourers were unlucky in love. Jack Mitchell promised himself that 'someday' he would 'go home and get married', but the happy day was always being postponed. A Queensland observer estimated that about 90 per cent of migratory labourers were unmarried. 'They may die hungry, thirsty and homeless in the bush without greatly affecting any other human lives', he reflected.

Some of these chronic wanderers were probably black sheep, alcoholics or psychological cripples. Country folk were sometimes astounded to learn that the swagman who had recently drowned in a local waterhole was none other than the son of an English gentleman or the brother of a city tycoon. James Ballingall, a notorious drunkard, worked for years around stations in the Corowa district, but it was only after he dropped dead in his room at the Mill hotel that he was found to have a rich sister in Toorak who regularly sent him money.

The wilful wanderer was the colourful exception rather than the rule among long-distance travellers. Local ties were so important that it was generally only the foolish or desperate man who moved off his home ground in search of work. In 1888, however, as the construction boom ebbed in New South Wales and South Australia and the drought began to grip the inland corridor, the number of desperate vagabonds was growing. Early in August, when shearing was already well under way around Bourke, a plaintive letter appeared in the *Western Herald*:

Sir—Please find a space in your paper for these few lines. It may help many like myself. I cannot get any employment. It's not for the want of asking or looking for it. I have already travelled—in addition to the 10,000 miles from





England—from Sydney to Bourke, a 78 days' tramp, seeking work in every town on the way. I have a wife and family to maintain, and they cannot live without their father works for them. I have been out of work for six months, and it looks very much like being out another six. I'm a painter and plumber by trade, served eight years in Birmingham, and it's a sorry case if I've come out this distance to ramble about the country like Christian in Pilgrim's Progress. You know what I mean—that detested swag. Every town I came to on the way from Sydney to the end of the Western line told me the same tale—work very slack. I hope I don't have to take my wife and family back to England, but I can't stay out here and starve.

Hoping I shall very soon get work, HENRY F. SEYMOUR

Seymour had learned a bitter lesson in the laws of migration. By moving on, he had believed he could get by, even if he did not get on. But every step on the long tramp from Sydney had carried him further from the urban labour market where his immigrant's skills would have found most profitable employment.

### MOVING ON AND GETTING ON

If America was a land dedicated to the pursuit of liberty and the pursuit of happiness, Australia was a land dedicated, above all, to the pursuit of material prosperity. When historians and politicians sang their country's praises it was its wealth and economic opportunity that they lauded. Centennial poets extended an invitation to the toiling masses of the 'Old World':

There's room for millions more of men to live,  
 Not mere existence with a doom  
 By chances of this life that give  
 To myriads who would gladly toil  
 For humblest daily bread no hope  
 Of honest work, but fertile soil  
 And sunny climate, with full scope  
 For him who dreads not work, and bears  
 Stout heart to live amidst the free,  
 And, as he lives and pass the years,  
 To gather clustering round his knee  
 His children, heirs to his bright life.  
 This is Australia. After hundred years  
 Of peace and freedom from all strife,  
 She looks the world around to find her peers.

No previous generation of Australians had been luckier than the gold-rush settlers whose success stories dominated the celebrations of 1888. They had arrived at a moment of golden opportunity and had ridden to prosperity on the crest of a long economic boom. But the frontiers of opportunity had begun to close. People now travelled farther in search of more modest fortunes. The great age of pastoral expansion had ended as the last of the overlanders claimed the arid pastures of the Kimberleys. The yeoman ideal of independence and modest comfort was being severely tried as the last of the free selectors battled the dense rainforests of the northern rivers and the dust and scrub of the Mallee. Mechanisation and the rule of the quartz and silver kings was pushing the last of the prospectors to the distant mining frontiers of North Queensland, New Guinea and Western Australia.

In the cities, too, the 'chances of this life' were narrowing. Young people who moved from Sandhurst to Melbourne enjoyed better-paying jobs than those who



*A camp beside the newly completed Cairns–Herberton railway, north Queensland. The steamy climate and rugged terrain made work and travel difficult for railway navvies and prospectors.*

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stayed behind, but this perhaps said more about the gold town's decline than about the prosperity of the metropolis. As city businesses grew larger and their ownership more concentrated, employees found it harder to better themselves. The usual pattern, represented by more than 40 per cent of Sydneysiders marrying in the late 1880s, was for sons to occupy a job with roughly the same status as their fathers. It was common still for a son to be apprenticed to his father's trade, taken into a family business or 'spoken for' to his father's employer. Only a small minority of bridegrooms, about one in five, had risen to a more prestigious occupation than their fathers', and rather more, about one in three, had fallen below their fathers' occupational level. The amount of movement, up and down, was greater than it had been a generation before; but significantly, the numbers of downwardly mobile city dwellers had grown faster than the upwardly mobile.

Immigrants stepping ashore at Circular Quay or Port Melbourne entered a harsher environment than their predecessors in the 1850s or 1860s. In the competition for the best jobs the Australian born, who could rely on the help of friends and kin, fared better than the immigrant and had better chances of climbing the occupational ladder. Only about one in eight immigrants who married in Sydney had a better job than his father but among the Australian born the proportion was about one in five. Still, English and Scottish immigrants fared much better than the Irish, who usually began their Australian careers in the most menial labouring jobs and improved their status only very slowly, if at all.

Yet the belief in Australia as a 'working man's paradise' was slow to die. Patriotic statisticians could point to the average Australian's high wages, well-supplied table and healthy bank balance as proof of his prosperity. But the average Australian was a fictional character and the reassuring statistics concealed enormous variations in the economic prospects of individuals. After five unhappy years in Sydney the English-born artisan Thomas Dobeson had to agree with his wife that they would have been better off if they had never left England. 'My wife tells me plain that she wishes we were back Home again,' he reported. 'I tell her she don't understand it at all. We are the grandest nation, we have so much per head. She says she wishes she had hold of our share.'



Hop pickers, Tasmania, by A.H. Fullwood.  
*Adults and children return from a day's work in the  
Denvent valley. Oil, 1893.*

TASMANIAN MUSEUM AND ART GALLERY

III  
PRIVATE LIVES