Scenes from pastoral life. Oil paintings by John Alfred Turner, 1891 (upper), 1886 (lower). Turner lived in Melbourne and painted descriptive and romantic scenes of bush life. The paintings are untitled and difficult to interpret. In the upper picture, five men depart on good horses in the early morning, as if they have been relieved by the other men. An old bush hut stands in the foreground. The newly built shearing shed behind it lacks the outside holding yards of a working shed. In the lower picture the five horsemen arrive towards sunset at the Shearer's Arms. They are too well mounted to be typical shearers, most of whom walked from shed to shed. Perhaps they are boundary riders.
PRIVATE COLLECTION

CHAPTER 8

PASTORAL LIFE

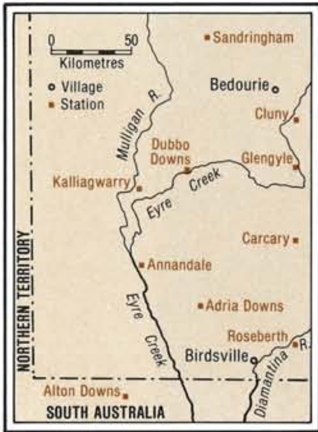
IN SEPTEMBER 1888 Thorold Grant, an employee of the Adelaide pastoral company Elder Smith, arrived in Birdsville to visit cattle stations in the Channel country of southwest Queensland. His mission was to persuade pastoralists to stop dealing with other Adelaide firms, or to send their cattle to market in Adelaide rather than Sydney or Melbourne. The Channel country was 'purely pastoral, rather thinly grassed principally stony plains and sandhills', and was the most isolated pastoral region in the eastern colonies. It was first occupied in the 1860s and most was leased by 1880, a peak year of pastoral occupation owing to a run of good seasons. Since then, 1884 to 1886 had been dry, and cattle prices began to fall from 1886. Now there was another drought.

In Birdsville, Grant prepared for a long trip, noting in his diary: 'anything in the shape of a useful horse decidedly dear'. On 10 October he reached Alton Downs on the Herbert River in South Australia, and then moved on to Adria Downs, where 'wells have been sunk liberally, and sound attempts at development made'. Here, fencing was cheap at £17 a mile, as it was hard going to cart fenceposts across heavy sand. The stock was good, with 'inoculation and spaying extensively carried out'. Yet Grant could see that 'without a considerable change for the better in the weather, there will be no cattle hence next season'. Travelling towards Annandale, Grant reached a well with a steam pump and a man in charge, but the horses had to be sent some distance into the sandhills to find feed. Annandale, owned by the Hood brothers, carried 7000 cattle, and Grant found the homestead 'well furnished and fitted up—there being a Miss Hood'. But even inside the well-constructed house it was 38 degrees Celsius, and the nights were muggy and close. Walter Hood 'talks of patronising the Melbourne market more in future: disgusted with Adelaide ... He is too deaf and bitter to argue with'.

On to Kalliagwarry, where Fraser the manager was also disheartened with Adelaide prices, then to Dubbo Downs where Grant stayed to rest the horses. The manager of Glengyle was away, so Grant pushed on to Cluny, a large station carrying 16 000 cattle. All the cattle went to Sydney and the owners had paddocks

on the Macquarie River where they could hold stock over for a good market. The manager, Brodie, told Grant that the dingoes were doing 'an inestimable amount of damage'; Grant noted in his diary that at Dubbo Downs the manager was trying to preserve the dingoes 'in order to meet the incoming rabbits'. Cluny had increased its stock fourfold since 1884–86 and Grant wrote: 'should similar bad times again visit these parts I am convinced that the loss of cattle in this district will be heavy'.

It was the richer men on large stations whom Grant visited, for many smallholders had been forced to sell out. Grant saw out-of-work cattle hands camped beside creeks or tramping in search of work. The cattlemen had come to accept the hot sun, sparse feed and unpredictable temperatures. They really resented the low prices for their cattle in the city.



Only the first part of Grant's journey in the Channel country is described in the text. Later he travelled from Bedourie to Birdsville to catch the mail to Adelaide, back to Bedourie for the annual races where he met more cattlemen, and then via Sandringham back to Birdsville. He was lost near Sandringham but his knowledge of bushcraft saved him.
GARY SWINTON

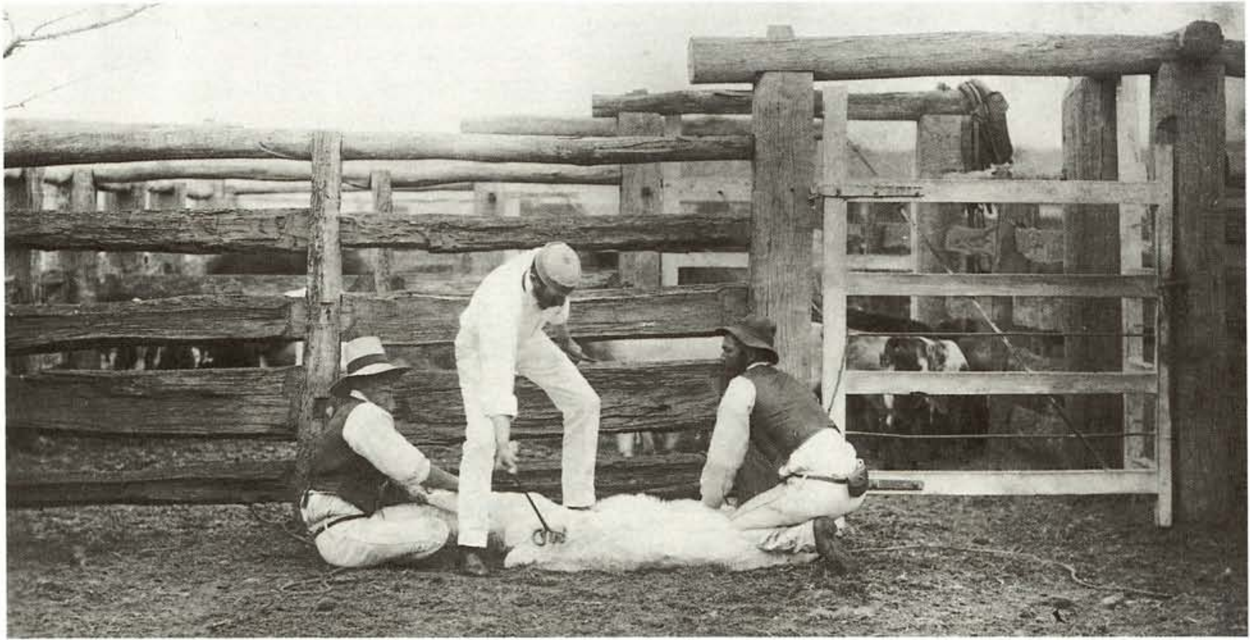
On the farthest frontier of settlement, pastoralists felt the push and pull of a capitalist market system that stretched from London to Birdsville. By 1888, eighty million sheep and eight million cattle had been spread across the Australian colonies. The pastoral industry had absorbed one-third of total Australian capital investment over the previous three decades in the purchase of crown land and in the construction of fences, dams and buildings. Wool accounted for 60 per cent of Australian exports and pastoralists were by far the largest group of wealthy people in the colonies. But many were heavily in debt to banks and mortgage companies; beef was in oversupply on home markets and wool export prices were falling. Pastoralists continued to occupy the top place in colonial society, but their position was increasingly insecure. The creation of the pioneer legend had begun. James Bonwick lamented in *The romance of the wool trade* that 'the roving condition of old squatterdom' was now over in most areas, but observed that in some remote places pastoralism was still 'an attractive occupation to the lovers of adventure, the pioneers of civilization, the intrepid heroes of the bush'.

THE PASTORAL REGIONS

By 1888 all the fertile lands were settled, and second sons or sons of professional men wishing to take up land had to look further afield for new properties. Even established pastoralists could not resist the lure of pastures further out. Albert Wright, a second-generation landowner, left his wife and family on their station in New England while he travelled out to the two properties he owned in Queensland. Managing all his affairs meant a great deal of work and worry and frequent separation from his beloved family, but for him the land was worth it all.

Men, beasts and money moved from inner to outer pastoral lands. Speaking generally of the pastoral industry, Timothy Coghlan wrote that 'nature, assisted by legislation, contributed to shape settlement into its present form'. This was true in part. How the land was used depended on soil and climate and on the will of government, which had attempted to open land to farmers at the expense of pastoralists. But even more than the laws of parliament, the laws of supply and demand decided how the land would be used. Prices and profits connected sheep and cattle, the old settled regions and the arid regions, pastoralist and worker. It was prices and profits which tied the 'deaf and bitter' Walter Hood and the other cattlemen of the Channel country to the city markets.

These market forces were, like the weather, distance and technological developments, beyond the control of the men who owned the land. Since the end of the gold rushes of the 1850s, the number of sheep had increased fourfold and the number of cattle had doubled. In some areas, sheep had pushed cattle out because wool was more profitable than beef. The sale of meat was limited to the domestic market until pastoralists could develop a successful refrigerated meat



Branding cattle. Outback cattle runs were held on annual leasehold from the colonial governments. Sparse grazing and insecurity of tenure made fencing the whole run too costly. The annual muster of the free-range cattle was the cattlemen's equivalent of the annual shearing. Neighbours had to agree on fair shares of new calves, which were then branded with the owner's mark. Sheep farming pushed cattle out into the arid inland plains, into north Queensland, which was too humid for sheep, and up into the high country of the Great Dividing Range. Inland cattle faced long drives to city markets.
OXLEY LIBRARY

export trade, a development in its first experimental stages. A canned meat export boom in the late 1860s had declined as American and Argentine chilled meat entered the British market; Australian meat faced a long journey through the tropics and had to be frozen. Several refrigerated meat companies began shipments in the early 1880s, but soon failed.

Meanwhile, cattle numbers had declined in New South Wales, and grown only slowly in South Australia, Tasmania and Victoria. Queensland held more than half Australia's cattle and drovers overlanded 200 000 head to the southern colonies in 1888, straight to the city abattoirs or to holding stations to be fattened. The great herds moved towards the capital city markets, but there were local movements too, to the north Queensland goldfields and to Broken Hill. Wherever they went, there was little profit in 1888, for droving was expensive in dry seasons. By late in the year drought in Victoria and the Riverina had brought demand for Queensland cattle to a standstill, and city markets were glutted.

SHEEP AND CATTLE (IN MILLIONS)

	Sheep		*Per cent*	*Cattle*	
	1861	1888	1888	1861	1888
NSW	6	47	60	2.2	1.6
QLD	4	13	16	0.6	4.5
VIC	6	11	14	0.6	1.3
SA	3	6	7	0.3	0.5
TAS	1	1	1	0.01	0.1
WA	0.3	2	2	0.1	0.1
	20.3	80	100	3.8	8.1

The pastoralists farthest out first felt the pinch in times of drought or falling prices. The spectacular development of the last decade had been the occupation of the Never-Never. In 1888, one-quarter of South Australian sheep were beyond the declared counties, half the Western Australian sheep were in arid country, and one-quarter of New South Wales sheep were in the western division. Most of these pastoralists were heavily in debt and sheep and rabbits were eating out the natural herbage. But pastoralists let the sheep multiply, for they were caught between sagging wool prices and high interest payments. The breeding of good flocks took time and money, and while the boom lasted, inferior sheep were used to stock the outback runs. These would clip at two kilograms a sheep, while a good Riverina flock clipped at three kilograms and each fleece was worth twice as much per kilogram weight.

In the better-watered grasslands, pastoralists had invested huge sums of money developing their flocks and properties. Under the land acts, colonial governments had put large amounts of crown land onto the market, and pastoralists had borrowed to buy it. All the best land was now freehold. Secure in their possession, the owners constructed fences, dams and wells, and buildings. Good breeding techniques also improved the quality of the sheep and so the yield of the land. The fertile grasslands formed an inner pastoral region that stretched from the Darling Downs in Queensland to New England and the Liverpool Plains, south along the inland slopes to the Riverina and into the Western District of Victoria and the central hill country of South Australia.

In Queensland, the Darling Downs had been settled since the 1840s, and now grazed three million sheep. The eastern half of the Downs contained many large freehold properties: nine of over 40 000 hectares each, six of 20 000–40 000, and ten of 10 000–20 000 hectares. C.B. Fisher, formerly a big landowner in South Australia, held 66 000 hectares, and James Tyson held 100 000 hectares. Tyson had been born in New South Wales in 1819 of a convict mother and had worked his way up. He was now very rich; he owned several other large properties and leased more than one million hectares of government land in three colonies. He did not drink, smoke or swear, and had few friends. He and the other big landowners

Sheep drinking artesian water. At Kallara near Bourke, artesian water was discovered in 1879. Drilling by pastoralists and by the New South Wales and Queensland governments located underground water that greatly increased the carrying capacity of outback runs. There was now a danger that the thin native grasses would be eaten out.
MITCHELL LIBRARY

maintained abrasive relations with the farmers and townspeople. The twenty-five largest properties grazed three-quarters of the Downs sheep, but there were also 221 small graziers, many of whom sympathised with the farmers.

Like other established areas along the inland corridor, the Darling Downs was the heartland for expansion into the arid grasslands. Tyson, Fisher and other Downs pastoralists held leasehold stations elsewhere in Queensland. In the outback, sheep and cattle numbers had doubled in the past decade. The Maranoa and Warrego pastoral districts to the west of the Downs along the New South Wales border held 3.4 million sheep and Mitchell in central Queensland held four million. The unsettled districts were the great frontier for South Australian, Victorian and New South Wales pastoralists, as well as the Darling Downs men. When the Central Queensland Meat Exporting Company was established in 1886, all the main shareholders were wealthy Victorian pastoralists—Andrew Rowan, the Fairbairns, F.W. Armytage, E. Weinholt and others—with large Queensland properties.

Charles Brown Fisher was one of the most enterprising pastoralists in Australia. In addition to a large Darling Downs freehold property, he owned freeholds in Victoria and leaseholds in outback Queensland. At Victoria River Downs and other stations in the Northern Territory, he ran 30 000 cattle brought overland from south Queensland. He sent trial shipments of cattle to southeast Asia. Critics thought the scale of his operations left him vulnerable to bad seasons or low prices. Pastoral pioneers of South Australia *1, (1925) Adelaide 1974.*

In New South Wales, the colony had been divided into three divisions under the 1884 Land Act. The eastern division held thirteen million sheep on the tablelands and the inland slopes of the Great Dividing Range. In some places, isolation had helped to form a sense of regional identity, as in New England and the Monaro, where most pastoralists and free selectors had resolved their differences. The central division held twenty-one million sheep, half of them in the Riverina, where there had been bitter fighting over the land around Deniliquin. The boundary of the central and western divisions followed the Barwon, Lachlan and Murrumbidgee rivers for most of the way, but the real boundary was the change in vegetation from the central grasslands to the western saltbush scrub. The western division grazed thirteen million sheep on large leasehold properties, most of recent origin. As in other colonies, men and money, flocks and herds, moved between the fertile and arid divisions. The movement was not always from the fertile areas to the more arid; as men gained a foothold and economic security in outlying areas, some managed to move back into the more profitable regions. Many of the settled New South Wales men had larger properties in Queensland, and some, such as Albert Wright, spent much of their time travelling between them.

Albert Wright's father had been a prosperous farmer on the Upper Hunter and Albert had left school at fourteen to manage two properties his father had bought in the northwest of New South Wales. Six years of isolation, hard work and responsibility forced Albert into premature adulthood. He remained a chronic worrier and obsessive worker for the rest of his life. In 1888, he was forty-six years old. He owned Wongwibinda in New England, where he ran mainly sheep and some cattle and pigs. He also owned Fairfield and Nunalbin in Queensland and was part-owner of a station in the Gulf area of Queensland. Twice a year he travelled to the northern colony to supervise the movements of the cattle to market and to check on the work being done there. But his home base since 1884 had been New England, where most of his relations and his wife's family lived.

The family had lived at Nunalbin in Queensland for some time, but the effects of the climate on his wife and children and their frequent illnesses, had forced Albert to look for a New England property. The death in 1884 of their oldest son Bertie was the last straw, and the family left Nunalbin for good. Albert was a cattleman, with little faith in the intelligence of sheep. But there was more money in sheep and a few good clips, he thought, would clear his debts on the Queensland properties. When he was away in Queensland drafting cattle for the summer sales in the Hunter valley, he left the New England property in the competent charge of his wife.

Albert Wright.
UNIVERSITY OF NEW ENGLAND ARCHIVES

Booloominbah, designed by John Horbury Hunt for the New England pastoralist F.R. White, 1887–88. This elaborate house of forty-five rooms suggests power and success, with its air of King Arthur and Camelot. The interior is a maze of inconvenient rooms and passageways. White favoured a modern style. Victorian pastoralists, mostly of humble Scots origin, stuck to a more conservative Italianate style, as shown in this watercolour (below) by William Tibbets of an unidentified Victorian homestead.

UNIVERSITY OF NEW ENGLAND ARCHIVES, NATIONAL LIBRARY

In Victoria, half the sheep were grazed south of the Great Dividing Range, and half on the northern plains. The Western District remained in the hands of the pioneer freehold pastoralists, whose properties were smaller and freer of debt than those on the Darling Downs. The Western District pastoralists enjoyed more cordial relations with their small farming neighbours, for they had helped to create a local society where they were accorded the benefits of status and authority, but also accepted the responsibilities of their position. On the northern Victorian plains pastoral leaseholders were retreating before the influx of selectors from the old exhausted wheat lands of South Australia and the central Victorian goldfields. They did not fight by buying freehold and selecting in false names, as had the Western District pastoralists in the 1850s and 1860s. By now there was a lack of will. Some retired and some retreated to outback New South Wales or Queensland. Sheep numbers were maintained on the northern plains because of the rise of mixed farming.

The relationship between settled district and arid outback, between freehold and leasehold, was common across Australia, including Victoria. Many of the Mallee leaseholds were still held by Western District and Wimmera pastoralists who used them for winter grazing. The leaseholds, however, had been devastated by rabbits and many runs had been abandoned. The Mallee had the reputation of being an abominable wilderness, but now South Australian farmers who knew how to work mallee land were selecting on the southern fringe. Most pastoralists resented the selectors, but E.H. Lascelles of Lake Coorong welcomed them, and in 1888 started subdividing his run.

Fifty years earlier, the Western District had itself been a frontier region for Tasmanians. The pastoral society of the midland plain of Tasmania was now, by Australian standards, small and old-established. People still used the old term 'sheep farmer'. The plain was now overpopulated, and men left the villages each year for the mainland shearing. Stud sheep were exported to the expanding pastoral properties of the eastern colonies.

In South Australia, as in Victoria, a holding of more than five thousand hectares was considered a large freehold estate. There were 130 of these, and they covered 2.6 million hectares, nearly one-third of all the freehold land in the colony. The

two largest groups of estates were in the central hill country north of Adelaide, and in the southeast around Mount Gambier. The pastoralists of the central hill country were a well-established local gentry with a sense of social responsibility. They had not been greedy and the estates were free of debt. When hard times came to South Australia after 1881, the pastoralists did not oppose the introduction of a land tax and income tax in 1884, despite their strong representation in both houses of parliament. The largest estate was Bungaree, owned by G.C. Hawker. Like many of his neighbours, Hawker held outside leases which he worked together with Bungaree, where he had bred a large, heavily fleeced merino, suited to the arid interior.

The interior districts contained some 300 leaseholds, many of which were consolidated into larger holdings. Price Maurice had invested over £27 000 in his Mount Eba property since 1878, and sheared 50 000 sheep, but he was 500 kilometres away from Port Augusta and cartage costs were high even after the extension of the northern railway in 1888. This year saw the beginning of the end of the leasehold empires, for many leases expired in 1888. The government decided to subdivide leases adjoining the settled counties, on the argument that they could be 'more profitably worked with inside holdings'. Rents were increased, but the land was already overgrazed, and drought and low wool prices led many to believe that the 48 000 bales of wool shipped from Port Augusta in 1888 might never again be equalled.

In Western Australia, John Forrest reported to the legislative council on his survey of the country between Perth and Bunbury 'in the event of a railway being built through it'. He reported that there were perhaps 200 000 hectares of agricultural land 'capable of supporting a large peasant population in the future'. However, farming languished because there was no market for farm produce, and able young men aimed for 'a position of affluence', not a 'mere living'. There were

Charles Conder, Yarding sheep. *Oil, 1890.*
NATIONAL GALLERY OF VICTORIA

better prospects in the timber industry, pastoral pursuits in the north, and the pearl shell fisheries. Even here, however, Western Australia lagged badly as a result of isolation and poor and dispersed natural resources. The colony contained two million sheep and 95 000 cattle, most in the southwestern corner. The rest was arid. The hope was the Kimberleys, with a moister climate and better pastures, and now, with the discovery of gold, a growing market. There were 88 000 sheep, shipped up from the southeast to Derby and occupying river pastures in west Kimberley. In east Kimberley there were said to be 20 000 cattle that had been overlanded from Queensland. Early in 1886 Charles Macdonald, a pioneer overlander, was travelling to Derby to claim his lease on the Fitzroy River when he saw sheep grazing and met men working for the Kimberley Pastoral Company. The two frontiers had met. The great trek around the continent with flocks and herds had ended.

George Charles Hawker of Bungaree, South Australia. Hawker led the pastoral aristocracy of the central hill country. He was a member of parliament from 1856–65 and from 1875, and voted for the introduction of land tax and income tax in 1884. He collected paintings and statues, and liberally supported the establishment of the Zoological Gardens, the Royal Agricultural and Horticultural Society, the South Australian Jockey Club and the Church of England. The liberal attitudes of Hawker and other pastoralists helped to create a political atmosphere in South Australia less abrasive than in the eastern colonies. Pastoral pioneers of South Australia *1, (1925) Adelaide 1974.*

SHEEP: THE PASTORAL YEAR

A traveller making the rapid train journey now possible between Melbourne and Brisbane would observe a strong climatic difference. If the traveller left Victoria in February, the grass was brown and parched and large areas were blackened by bushfires. Not until Goulburn was there a green tinge, which was fully developed by the time the train reached Sydney. In Queensland, February was the most tropical month of the year, hot and humid, with heavy coastal rains and often some rain in the western pastoral districts. A rail journey in August would show the reverse contrast of seasons, with green pastures in Victoria and dry brown grass in Queensland.

The pastoralist's working year was set by the changing of the seasons and the mating and lambing of his flocks but within these limits there was scope for judgment. Human intervention was directed at producing the best fleeces and so the greatest profits, and the sequence followed by the pastoralists grew from this aim. About a month after shearing, sheep were dipped to kill lice and ticks. A lousy sheep would rub itself against a fence or post, and so damage the wool. Large stations had a dip long enough for the sheep to take a minute to swim through it; smaller properties used a circular dip in which the sheep were kept under for a minute. Pastoralists debated the rival merits of arsenical and carbolic dip.

Sheep were also dosed with arsenic as a cure for intestinal worms. The Warrah manager wrote angrily in January: 'arsenic as a cure for worms is of no permanent avail and is discreditable to the veterinary science of the age', but in May he was forced to admit that it had cured the sheep. His lambs had also developed an addiction to the 'pea', a vetch weed that grew on the ridges and had effects similar to opium. Lambs left their mothers in search of pea vetch, refused wholesome food and became susceptible to worms.

The best time to mate rams and ewes varied according to the climate. In temperate areas the ewes had to drop the lambs before the cold of winter, but not so early as to run the risk of lambing while feed was still sparse and dry in the early autumn. Lambing had to be over at least a month before the start of the shearing, when all hands were needed. There was a fair degree of flexibility. The lambing season in Victoria was from April to June for merinos, and from July to August for crossbreds.

Spring lambing was common in Queensland, where cold weather was not a factor. In the Riverina, rams went to the ewes early in November. Large, well-run properties such as Warrah, had autumn, winter and spring lambings, although the autumn lambing was the main one. The lambing rate—the number of lambs born and surviving as a percentage of ewes—was the measure of success. In 1888 the

The Breeding Ewes are to all appearance well in lamb, although rain would be a welcome visitation at the present time I have no apprehension as to the result of the lambing in the absence of it. The special Stud Ewes have already commenced to drop and 27 lambs have been registered without any decrease.

Reports are very rampant at present in this neighbourhood as to the possibilities of trouble arising during the ensuing shearing owing to the "Shearers Union" I do not share in the alarm to the same extent that some of our neighbours do, but at the same time think that the substitution of the new machines for the old Shears will be but a wise precaution as it will find us better prepared in the event of any difficulty arising. I do not however urge the introduction of the machines on this ground alone. I think the Sheep Shears have or will shortly become things of the past and know for certain that a great many of our neighbouring Flock masters are simply waiting for the Company to take the initiative

I can speak with confidence concerning the merits of the Atmospheric machine known as "Sucklings Australian Shearer" having seen the machine at Work at the same time I am unable to say definitely what would be the practical result when tested on a large scale. The other machine before the Public known as Wolseley's I have had no opportunity of seeing but judging from reports it would not only be fair to the inventor to afford him an opportunity of competing but it would be in the interests of the Company to provide every facility for deciding as to the respective merits of the rival machines for their future guidance. I therefore recommend that one half the shed be fitted up and provided with Suckling's Machine and the remaining

13.

Shearing Report for week ending
September 15th 1888

Number of Sheep shorn as p. last Return	36152
" " " during week	15894
Total shorn to date	52046

Particulars of Sheep that have passed through Shed during week

Class	Sht No.	Number of Sheep	[illegible] of Bales	Number of Bales	Gross Weight			Tare			Nett Weight			Average	Remarks
Merino Hoggets	90	12902	[illegible]	220	852	2	25	21	2	12	833	0	13	7 23	Shorn as Lambs
Do.	91	3001	[illegible]	52	193	2	21	5	0	12	188	2	9	7.00	Unshorn as Lambs
Ewe Hoggets	80. 88	7825	[illegible]	139	551	3	24	13	2	17	538	1	7	7.68	Shorn as Lambs
Do.	86	2217	[illegible]	38	155	1	3	3	2	26	151	2	5	7.65	Unshorn as Lambs
Breeding Ewes	18	562													M.S. Passing through

Number of Bales despatched as p. Return	652
" " during week	280
" " remaining in Shed	50
Total pressed to date	982

Harry F. Herbert

New South Wales rate was a low 55 per cent because of drought. Warrah's 84 per cent came from good management and adequate water and grass. Low lambing rates in Australia reflected the fact that pastoralists could not afford to assist the ewes; they invested their capital in fences rather than in shepherds. At two weeks a lamb was tailed to help keep it free from dags, and marked by clipping the ear. Most male lambs were castrated, and were then called wethers.

With the warmer weather came the shearing. It lasted a week or so on small properties, but two months on large ones, where preparations began months beforehand and accelerated as shearing approached. The sheep were mustered, and the old and the poor were culled and after shearing were sold for meat or tallow. The pastoralist cleaned the shearing shed and repaired broken battens on the floor. He got in supplies of food, woolpacks and tar. He made agreements with local shearers, usually small farmers and their sons, and replied to up-country shearers who had written to reserve a stand.

Conflict erupted along the inland corridor as the Amalgamated Shearers' Union sought to impose the union shed, but pastoralists who shore union had no trouble. Corona, a large leasehold property 90 kilometres north of Broken Hill, shore union and followed the same routine as in earlier years. It was owned by Harvey Patterson, who had bought a share of the Broken Hill syndicate in 1885, and was now a leading director of Broken Hill Proprietary Company, dividing his time between Corona and Melbourne. Thirty shearers and about the same number of

In his monthly report of 24 April 1888, George Fairbairn (left), stock superintendent at the Warrah pastoral property of the Australian Agricultural Company, told Jesse Gregson, general manager at Newcastle, that he saw machine shearing as insurance against union trouble. In the event, the machines did not work, and 114 919 sheep were shorn by hand without a union delegate even entering the shed. The manager and wool classer at Warrah (right) later compared weights and qualities of fleeces with previous years, and planned breeding and culling for future years.

ANU ARCHIVES OF BUSINESS AND LABOUR

Shearing done. Ewes' first quality combing wool has been packed at Mittagong, New South Wales. A large property had fifteen or more classes of wool, ranging from fine rams' down to pieces. The men's cook is on the left.
LA TROBE LIBRARY

Shearers' Song.

The season is over;
The shearing is done;
The wages are paid; and
The "sprees" have begun.
But never a shanty
Gets sight of my cheques;
For far down the Murray
My Annie expects
A heart that is faithful,
A head that is clear,
And sufficient provisions
To last for a year!

HENRY LAWSON.

Sydney; November, 1888.

Town and Country Journal, *17 Nov 1888.*

additional hands arrived early in August, and the shearers fitted up at the station store, buying shears at 4s a pair, a sharpening stone for 2s or 3s, singlets or coloured shirts and tobacco and matches. Through the shearing, the Corona bookkeeper acted as banker for the men, deducting subscriptions to the union, paying 3s a week per man to the cook, and arranging payments to the kip (food) account. He also handled IOU notes for debts between the men, and sent off cheques for them.

Places on the board were allocated by lot. The bell rang at 6am on 4 August and backs went down. For weeks musterers had been bringing in the sheep and now they had to keep the holding pens full. The sheep were shorn in lots, so that the bales would contain identical wool; stud ewes and rams first, followed by general flock rams, ewes and wethers by age groups, then stragglers. Boys carried the fleeces to the woolrollers' tables, where the woolroller cut off daggy and seeded pieces and skirtings and rolled the fleece to expose the shoulder wool, which was the finest. The wool was scoured to reduce weight, graded, pressed and packed in bales. The bales were stamped with the station mark and a description of the wool.

The shearers at Corona sheared forty-eight hours a week under the union rule for seven weeks and five days to 26 September. They sheared 73 047 sheep, an average of 2435 per man, at £1 per 100. The highest tally was 3529, the lowest 1543. An average shearer made £24 for shearing 2400 sheep. After deductions for union fee, kip—share of the cost of food—and cook's wage and purchases at the store, he would take away a cheque for £18—£2 5s a week for eight weeks' work. This was more than double the wage of a permanent station hand, but the shearer lost time travelling and would get only two or three big sheds a year.

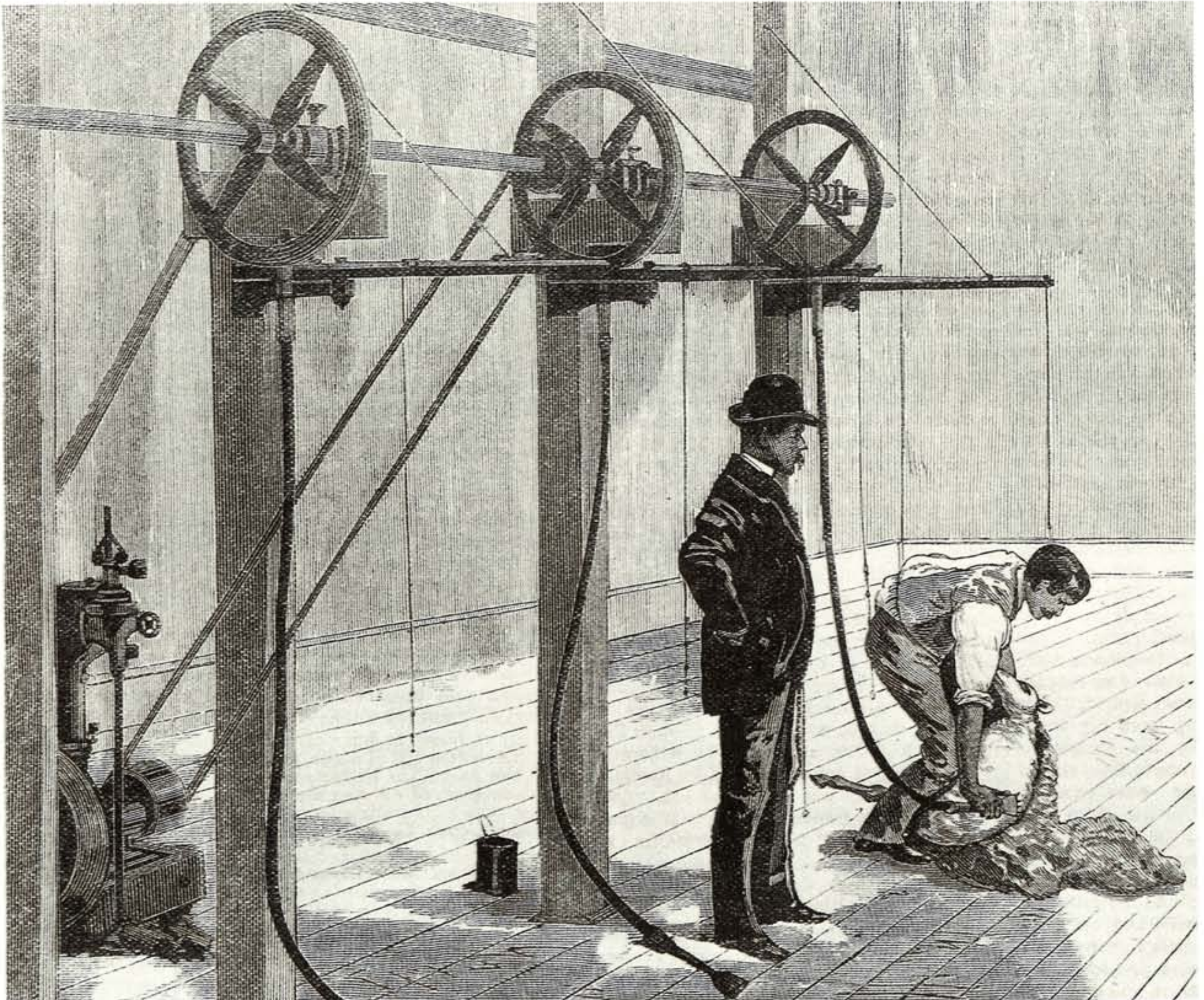
SHEARERS

The shearing season made a slow start in Queensland's eastern highlands through the first half of the year. In June and July the pace quickened as the large flocks of inland Queensland and of the upper Darling around Bourke and Walgett in New South Wales were shorn during the cooler, dry weather of mid-winter. The shearing then split into two parts. One group of shearers travelled east to the Liverpool Plains and the Hunter River to shear from September to at least November. High areas such as the New England plateau and Monaro sheared last,

in November and December, owing to the late spring. A second wave moved down the Darling to the stations below Wilcannia and into the Riverina in August. The season then spread eastward to reach the Wagga Wagga and Goulburn districts in October and November, then turned south into Victoria, where the Western District and Wimmera were in full swing in November. Tasmanian and South Australian pastoralists could call on abundant local labour and were not tied to the eastern mainland calendar.

Some 50 000 men, in addition to permanent pastoral workers, turned out for the shearing. Half were shearers and half were additional hands. Victoria was the main reservoir of professional shearers; others came from farming and pastoral districts in the Tasmanian midlands, the old farmlands of South Australia and New Zealand. Some were sons of small selectors who returned to the family farms each winter. Others were full-time rural labourers who, after shearing, turned to other jobs such as fencing, rabbiting, roadmaking and tank-sinking. Additional hands included the musterer, picker-up, fleece carrier, rouseabout, wool presser and cook. The visiting wool classer, a skilled specialist, judged the quality of the various types of fleece, and advised accordingly on the following year's breeding. The big outback stations relied on migratory shearers and were tied to their timetable.

Wolseley's patent sheep-shearing machine. Australasian, *19 Mar 1887.*



Pastoralists in settled districts could call on local farmers and their sons, and that gave them more flexibility. The long-distance professional shearers had rhythms different to those of the part-timers who sheared locally, but both groups had a common origin on small farms and selections.

A large body of rules and customs, mostly oral, had grown up over the years to specify the agreement between shearer and squatter. In many areas rates had not changed for decades; 15s per 100 sheep in Victoria, where the stands were close and food prices low; 17s 6d in New England, Monaro and other areas; and £1 in the outback, where men had to travel further and food prices were high.

This year, pastoralists faced two new decisions: to shear with the new Wolseley or Suckling machines or stay with hand blades, and to shear union or non-union. Stagnant wool prices, rising costs and disputes with shearers in the last few years had created interest in machine shearing. Machines removed the fleeces more closely and uniformly and if they could be used by unskilled local men as was claimed, that would free the pastoralist from the tyranny of 'the wandering insubordinate shearer'. This year, more than twenty large sheds in New South Wales used machine shearing for the first time. Dunlop sheared all its sheep with Wolseley machines and the men averaged 120 sheep a day, compared with 80 for hand shearing. Dunlop endured a six-week siege by union men, but the dispute

A. Garran (ed), Picturesque atlas of Australasia, *Sydney 1886–88*

TAR BOY.

Blade shearers at Hahndorf, 30 km east of Adelaide. Blade shearers had some room to move around with the sheep. The machine shearing restricted the shearer's movements and necessitated a change of technique. The punishing angle of the shearer's back was the same for both techniques.
SOUTH AUSTRALIAN ARCHIVES

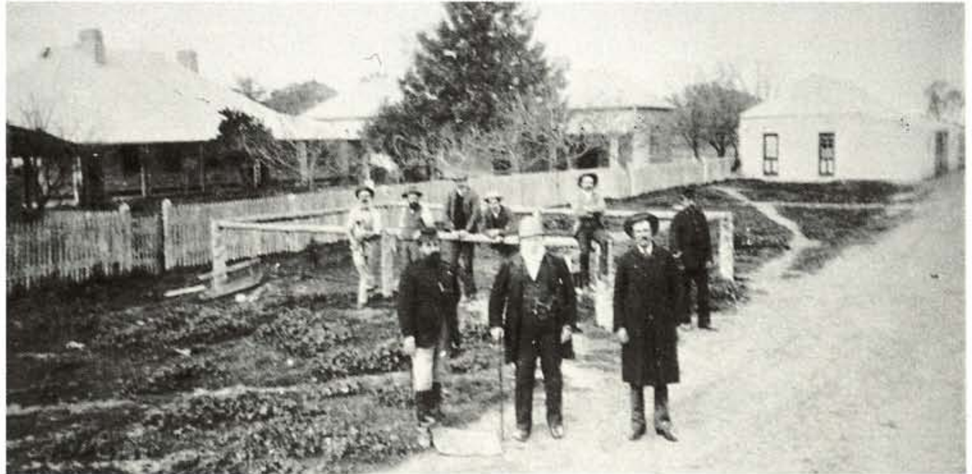
was over the use of non-union men and not over machine shearing, which the union accepted. Other pastoralists using machines were not so fortunate. The Suckling machines at Warrah broke down and were hung up. Albert Wright, visiting the Centennial Agricultural Show in Sydney, expressed himself 'very doubtful of the success of Suckling's machine'.

The Amalgamated Shearers' Union had been established in 1886 by W.G. Spence. Perhaps one-third of the nomad tribe of pastoral workers belonged to the ASU in 1888. The union was strongest among professional shearers in the big outback sheds, but was a force everywhere and included many of the best shearers. Goonoo Goonoo near Tamworth sheared non-union but with poor shearers, and the manager's post-mortem was: 'Knowing what I do now I would rather have commenced in the Union rules.'

Along the inland corridor, the ASU gained much ground. Perhaps half the big sheds sheared union and the sheep were shorn well and without incident. In other sheds, class antagonism sharpened, but this was complex and varied from region to region. Free selectors who sheared locally were often non-union, as they considered themselves to be proprietors and not labourers, and others needed the work and could not risk offending the local pastoralist. But their sons who went outback sheared union. Thomas Williams, an agent of the ASU, stated in a public address that the union 'deprecated violence in every possible manner, but if they had to fight would fight the matter out in such a manner as to gain the respect of those opposed to them'.

The issue was fought out on a matter of principle at Brookong, a large freehold property near Wagga Wagga whose owner had 220 000 sheep and refused to shear union. William Halliday, MLC, was a friend of local free selectors, to whom he gave water and stock forage in dry times: in 1887 they had given a banquet in his honour. Halliday and Spence were both good Presbyterians and men of character and principle. Halliday had donated £1000 to the New South Wales military contingent to the Sudan in 1885: in his home town of Creswick, Spence was a member of the colonial militia. Both believed in the rule of law and in justice, though in different ways. For Halliday it was, in the words of a neighbour, 'not a matter of payment for shearing . . . but as to whether an Employer is to be master

The Amalgamated Shearers' Union. W.G. Spence, president, sits centre front, with full dark beard. J.A. Cook (left) and C. Poynton, vice-presidents, sit on either side of him. The men, young to middle-aged, are dressed respectably, several showing watch chains. Sixteen delegates came from Victoria, twelve from New South Wales and only one from South Australia. Others besides the delegates also attended. The photograph was taken outside the Echuca Town Hall, where the conference was held from 8 to 10 March. Much time was spent discussing rules. Should members on strike have to keep up union dues? Would the union pay fines incurred by strikers? The conference was strongly against Chinese immigration. At the close of the conference Spence expressed his regret that station owners had not accepted invitations to attend. He thanked the Riverine Herald *for its 'accurate reporting of the conference'.*
ANU ARCHIVES OF BUSINESS AND LABOUR



William Halliday (centre) at Brookong.
MITCHELL LIBRARY

of his own shed or not'. Spence's unionism embodied a view of a new society, where the harmony of socialism would one day replace the conflict of capitalism.

By 17 August 250 union men were camped outside Brookong. They raided shearers' huts on the station, stopped non-union men with violence and held men in their camp by force. Halliday ordered by telegram a supply of forty Colt revolvers and ammunition and police were sent from Albury and Wagga Wagga, although there were few to spare from normal duties and from other trouble spots. There were still only fifteen police at Brookong on 18 August when the officer in charge considered whether he would have to order them to fire if the shearers attacked. But they did not. Ten were arrested and tried for rioting, nine were found guilty. The judge, Mr Justice Windeyer, considered that the riots were 'a dangerous attack on society', with no excuse in a country 'where every man has a chance to get a living by honest industry'. The leaders, John Parker and Brian Lee, were given three years of hard labour, four men got two years and three were given one year each. There was public consternation at the severity of the sentences. The mayor of Wagga Wagga called a public meeting and James Gormly MLA, champion of free selectors, supported petitions for clemency. The Queen was petitioned to remit part of the sentences, and the meeting broke up with three cheers for Her Majesty. No clemency was granted.

New England, with its cool climate, sheared in November and here the patterns of conflict were more complex than in the west and the Riverina. The resident owners of small freehold properties used local free selectors. Albert Wright at Wongwibinda sheared non-union with local men; 'young Chad', he noted, 'came but being Union couldn't put him on', and a week later 'young Chad and mate hanging about thinking to intimidate non-Union men who may come'. Wright had trouble getting a full shed and shearing lasted into December. At nearby Walcha there were violent struggles. Gangs of masked union men patrolled the countryside, but the police inspector at Armidale wisely avoided confrontations as much as possible.

Victoria also sheared in October and November and there was trouble in the Western District. At Andrew Chirnside's Mount Elephant station, union shearers who had completed forty-eight hours refused to work past noon on Saturday. Chirnside discharged them, refused to pay for 30 000 sheep already shorn, and arranged to get in non-union men. When the men sued for their wages, Chirnside told the court that he had accepted all union rules except those relating to hours of work, but the police magistrate found for the men.

Chirnside, an original pastoralist of the district, might not have realised how times were changing. His younger neighbour, John McArthur, was readier to compromise. The young second-generation squatter had led the fight against the union in 1887, but most of his neighbours had given in. This year he decided not to 'stand out almost alone like I did last year'. He agreed to the Union price of 15s per 100. The shearing started on 2 November, but two local men left 'on account of the unpleasantness they were subjected to by my Union shearers'. On 15 November the 'gentlemen shearers' claimed that the sheep were wet, and stopped. McArthur said:

> This was all nonsense. The fact is, I think, they want to be able to say that they shore here under the 8 hour or 48 hour a week business, and they make wet sheep the excuse to leave off. I made no opposition, but let Williams, the Union representative of the shed, have a bit of my mind on the matter.

Along the inland corridor a rural working class was beginning to form and to test its strength. Some workers dreamed of socialism; others of land and independence, or at least of a fair wage. They knew that they would never rise into the ranks of the squattocracy.

John McArthur.
McARTHUR FAMILY

A Position Of Affluence

A minority of the pastoral pioneers had survived the land struggles of the 1860s and various financial and natural hazards and were now wealthy. Many had recently borrowed heavily to buy and equip outback properties in New South Wales and Queensland, and their continuing wealth depended precariously on high wool prices and good seasons. But in the old settled regions, the pastoralists still constituted the nearest thing Australia had to a landed gentry.

Position depended on wealth. In South Australia, of the 65 people who had incomes of over £5000 a year, one-third were pastoralists, who formed a higher proportion of the £ 10 000-and-over-group. In the Western District of Victoria George Russell left £359 000 when he died in 1888, and John Edols of Colac left £201 000. Andrew Chirnside was moving up to £400 000, and the wealthiest of them all, Sir William Clarke, baronet, occupied his great mansion Cliveden in Melbourne in 1888 and was close to becoming a millionaire. The sons of such men would build on their fathers' fortunes as they came into their inheritance.

John McArthur, who had given the union representative a piece of his mind, was aged thirty-one in 1888 and was still a bachelor. He represented the best of the second generation in this established pastoral district. He was the eldest son of Peter McArthur, who had occupied Meningoort in 1839. Peter now also owned 5000 hectares at Lawrenny, which he had leased to John at the start of 1887. John lost £2500 on the year's transactions because of the bad season, but his father agreed to back him for 1888. He spent most mornings working in the office, leaving the routine outside work to his friend and manager Lucas.

John McArthur had been well educated, attending Geelong College and Ormond College at the University of Melbourne. He was a captain in the Victorian Mounted Rifles and spent most Tuesday afternoons on parade at Caramut. He had been appointed a magistrate at Caramut police court in 1887 and was president of the Caramut Literary and Debating Society, which he had established. He was asked in November 1888 to stand for the legislative council, but refused. He spent many afternoons in serious study of such works as Locke's *Civil government* and J.S. Mill's *Logic* and *Autobiography*, and wrote a long criticism of Henry George's *Progress and poverty*. His diary shows a busy round of social activity, broken by a trip to Britain

and Europe between March and October. Although he enjoyed the trip, he was pleased to get home. For this son of Scottish parents, the old country was no longer 'home'. He was a Presbyterian, but did not go to church very often. His diary for 1888 opened with the entry 'Sunday Jan 1: I had serious intentions of commencing the year by going to church, but it was so hot that I decided not to go'. He loved company, dances, races, visits, and the occasional prank. He noted one in his diary on 14 December.

> It was arranged the other day that we should be visited this afternoon by a combined force of the young ladies from Eulo, Caramut House and The Gums. By a way of a little diversion we dressed Whitehead [a friend] up as a nigger butler with a very large corporation of pillows, a most ridiculous costume, and a face well blackened with burnt cork ... When I rang the bell for tea it was brought in in the most solemn manner by the nigger. Miss Ross and Miss Todd laughed almost to the extent of rolling off their chairs, the nigger all the time passing around tea and cake quite solemnly. When this was done he said 'Is that all, massa?' I said 'That's all, Sambo', and he retired appearing in a few minutes as Whitehead *in propria persona.*

There were other men who had not inherited wealth, but who worked hard to establish an inheritance for their children. Thomas Macknight Hamilton had been born in Scotland in 1844 and emigrated to Victoria in 1860 to work on his uncle's Western District property. He lived frugally, worked hard and became a skilled manager, and in 1872 married the daughter of a wealthy landowner, William Rutledge. With the help of Rutledge he bought a small property in partnership with another man. The partners sold for a profit in 1882, and in April 1883 Hamilton purchased Ensay for £16 000.

Ensay was an established property in Gippsland, with 1300 hectares of freehold, including rich riverflats, large government leaseholds in the heavily timbered mountains and summer grazing rights over a large part of the Bogong High Plain. Hamilton spent a lot of money on development; by 1888 he had increased the freehold to 3000 hectares and had improved the pastures. He also rented 4000 hectares from selectors who dummied leasehold blocks for him. His plan of development was long run, and in 1888 he only began fencing and clearing. He did not increase his sheep and cattle numbers, but bought stud merino rams and ewes from the Western District. Ensay became one of the few large Gippsland sheep properties, and Hamilton easily won all the merino prizes at the Omeo show, a task made easier because the local farmers ran crossbreds. He sheared 26 765 sheep for a gross return of £4090 in 1888, but remained in debt for many years.

Hamilton was known locally and without animosity as the 'Lord of Ensay'. He became president of the Omeo shire in 1887, was founder and president of the Omeo Agricultural and Pastoral Society, and in 1888 rented at nominal cost a building on Ensay for a state school. The selectors shared his ideas of improvement; most of them were very poor, for they were too far from markets. They leased land to Hamilton and seasonal or contract work brought them a little cash. They carted the wool clip down to Bairnsdale and brought supplies back. Hamilton lent his shearing shed free of charge, sold fencing wire at cost and employed only local labour. The farmers' sons took the Ensay sheep and cattle up to the high plains in summer. There was, of necessity, a harmony of economic interests between the selectors and Hamilton.

Selectors were small proprietors and generally conservative; the Tasmanian midland villages provided strikebreakers at Brookong. But those who had slipped down the ladder, such as Ned Kelly's family and their neighbours in the northeast

The station boundary, *by A.H. Fullwood. Oil, 1891.*
ART GALLERY OF NEW SOUTH WALES

of Victoria, could become bitter and wild. The selector origins of the outback shearers may explain the curious admixture of union and non-union adherence and of radical and conservative elements in the shearers' attitudes. Spence and the ASU members wanted respect and decent working conditions as much as money. Some could expect to inherit farms, but most would not. The formation of a self-conscious rural working class had not progressed far in 1888.