

EARLY SETTLEMENT IN THE SURAT-MOUNT ABUNDANCE AREA

[By R. B. TAYLOR.]

(Read at a meeting of the Society on July 26, 1956.)

The initial exploration of the Maranoa came from the south. In the year 1835, the north-west boundary of discovery was a line along the McIntyre, Barwon, and Darling Rivers. Ten years later the alteration to such boundary line was limited to a few settlers on the lower Moonie River, and to the work then being carried out by Roderick Mitchell, a son of Sir Thomas Mitchell, in compiling a sketch of the five branches of the Balonne River in the vicinity of the present Queensland-New South Wales border.

In early 1846 Sir Thomas Mitchell, with a party of twenty-eight men, set out from the junction of the Macquarie River with the Darling. He crossed the Narran Swamp, and, after reaching the Balonne, travelled upstream, past the spot he named St. George's Bridge, to the Cogoon River which he followed to its source. He then went further north. While travelling along the upper Cogoon (also known as Muckadilla Creek), Sir Thomas Mitchell, on May 7, 1846, came upon a peak which he named "Mt. Abundance." Later, when compiling his official report of the journey, he named the surrounding country "Fitz Roy Downs" in honour of the then Governor of New South Wales, Sir Charles A. Fitz Roy, who arrived in Australia on August 2, 1846. "Mt. Abundance" is located twenty-five miles west-south-west of the present Town of Roma.

The first settler to follow Sir Thomas Mitchell to the Mt. Abundance area was Allan MacPherson who, with a superintendent and twenty men, and with sheep and cattle, set out for Mt. Abundance in the year 1847. The edge of occupied territory nearest to Mt. Abundance, in mid-1847, when Allan MacPherson passed by, was at St. George's Bridge.

The official list of persons who had obtained licences to depasture stock beyond the limits of location for the year ending June 30, 1848, included W. C.

Wentworth, Station on the Balonne River, and W. Ogilvie, "Culpa," Balonne River. In the same Gazette as the lease of "Culpa" was advertised, there appeared a notice of the granting of the lease "Nassau Burgurrah" to Robert Fitzgerald. "Nassau Burgurrah" was on the east bank of the Balonne commencing at St. George's Bridge and running north, whilst "Culpa" was on the west bank commencing a short distance upstream from St. George's Bridge.

Allan MacPherson arrived at Mt. Abundance in October 1847. Beside a waterhole in Muckadilla Creek about one and a half miles south of the peak Mt. Abundance, he erected the buildings and yards which became the original head station of his new run to which he gave the name "Mount Abundance." It was from this homestead that Leichhardt on April 4, 1848, wrote the last letter received from him.

The choice by Mr. MacPherson of the name "Mount Abundance" for his Station, the continued use of that title, as well as the later use of the phrase "the Maranoa" has led to the name "Fitz Roy Downs" passing into obscurity. Officially, Mount Abundance Station was taken up by William and Allan MacPherson. The leases consisted of strips of land along the Muckadilla and Bungeworgorai Creeks. The Muckadilla area was chosen by Mr. MacPherson as his sheep run, and the Bungeworgorai area as his cattle run.

By the end of 1847 Mr. Thomas Simpson Hall, a grazier of "Dartbrook," Hunters River, had formed "Yambougal" cattle station at the present site of Surat. In the later part of 1848 James Alexander Blythe established, but only for a short time, "Tingun Station" on what is now Blythe's Creek (twelve miles east of Roma), but which was then Tingun Creek. The establishment collapsed by reason of attacks by natives.

By a Gazette notice dated November 7, 1848, the Maranoa Pastoral District was created, and Land Commissioner John Henry Durbin placed in charge thereof. Commencing on the Barwon River, a little to the north of the present Town of Mungindi, the boundary of the district ran north-west to the Moonie, then upstream to about the present site of Nindigully, then north-west to St. George's Bridge, then along the Balonne,

Maranoa, and Amby Rivers to Mt. Bindango, across to Mt. Beagle (situated about twenty miles north of the present Town of Roma), then east to Sandy Creek (believed to be the present Tchanning Creek), down the Sandy and Dogwood Creeks to the Condamine, thence south to the Barwon and down that river to the point of commencement. The district contained 12,815 square miles. Despite the forebodings of certain people as to the success of wool growing in such localities, it was the pastoral industry which was responsible for the development of the Surat-Mount Abundance area.

To assist the residents in frontier districts in that region, the Government in 1848 formed the Native Police, Middle District. The Commandant was Frederick Walker, who established headquarters at Callandoon. A lieutenant and ten men were assigned to take charge of the lower Condamine and Maranoa district. It was at first intended that this party should patrol through the Maranoa, lower Condamine, and Dawson country, and not be permanently stationed anywhere, but this intention was later altered to the extent that headquarters for them were, by the end of 1851, established on the east bank of Tchanning Creek at a spot called Wandai Gumbal.

In early 1849 the Stations to the east of Mount Abundance were John Dangar's Station on the Tchanning, Mr. Edwards' Station, "Binbian," and Blythe and Chauvel's Station, "Tierreyboo," the latter situated in the vicinity of the present Town of Condamine.

Until 1850 the residents of the Surat-Mount Abundance area resorted to Maitland—a distance of about 600 miles—as their business centre and the destination for their wool and other produce.

During March-April 1849, Land Commissioner Durbin, accompanied by three troopers and a black boy, was at "Yambougal." About a month later he and his party were at Mount Abundance where they remained a few weeks carrying out their duties and assisting Mr. MacPherson, who was having serious trouble with the aborigines. At least seven of Mr. MacPherson's men were killed during the first two years of his occupation of Mount Abundance.

At the time of his visit, Commissioner Durbin had

intended establishing headquarters near Mount Abundance, but after gaining first-hand information as to the hostility of the natives in that locality, he decided to set up headquarters on land which is now the site of Surat, and which was then adjacent to Hall's Station buildings. In late 1849 and early 1850 this site was officially referred to as "Maranoa."

On September 3, 1849, following on a mutual arrangement between them, Roderick Mitchell, then Commissioner of Crown Lands at Tamworth, and Land Commissioner J. H. Durbin, exchanged positions, and Roderick Mitchell took up residence at "Maranoa" to which place a Chief Constable and a Clerk of Petty Sessions were appointed in January-February 1850. On June 18, 1850, "Surat on the Balonne River" was appointed a place for holding Courts of Petty Sessions.

It was towards the close of 1849 that Allan MacPherson withdrew his sheep from Mount Abundance and left it as a cattle station whilst he himself went back to Scotland.

A correspondent to the Maitland "Mercury" in about July 1850 said:

"I am happy to inform you that Mr. Commissioner Mitchell has established a good road between his Headquarters and Tirriboo, Messrs. Blythe and Chauvel's Station, to a point within twenty miles of which there is a private mail once a fortnight, so that a direct communication may now be said to exist even to the Fitz Roy Downs . . . The Maranoa District is being rapidly occupied from the eastward and the southward. The character which this District appears to have acquired of being infested by natives of determined courage, and most implacable to the whites, is undeserved and has arisen simply from the groundless fears of those who gave rise to the assertion, and who abandoned the District on seeing the corpses of the three men who committed suicide on the Cogoon River. I say "suicide" for the particulars of the events connected with their murder by the natives justifies the application of this term to their deaths. There is but one tribe here at all dangerous, that of the Cogoon River or Muckadilla Creek, a small band of murderers and marauders

who are flushed with success from their having driven Mr. MacPherson from Mount Abundance and other gentlemen from the District. Remove this tribe and the country will be quiet. The natives about the Stations are not only inoffensive, but are most useful."

Reviewing the position in the Surat-Mount Abundance area as at the end of 1850, the following description of the Maranoa District which appeared in a newspaper of January 1851 is pertinent:

"The Darling Downs has hitherto been the ultima thule to the west of Moreton Bay, but there is now rising behind it another District (the Maranoa) even now almost unoccupied, but which promises very shortly to become one of the most productive of the northern districts—tenders for runs for no less than one million of sheep having been received within the last few months. The country lies immediately to the west of the Darling Downs: it is watered by the Condamine, Balonne, Barwon, Moonie, Maranoa, and other rivers, besides numerous creeks. There are considerable scrubs, but along the waters there is generally a belt of fine, open forest from two to ten miles in breadth, covered thickly with grass mixed with saltbush and herbage—the finest of pasture; and in the north-west are the Fitz Roy Downs described by Sir Thomas Mitchell as the finest pastoral country he had ever seen. The climate is most excellent for cattle, and from the high elevation is so tempered that there is little fear of loss of weight in the fleece being suffered by sheep from the south—a common fear in coming to Moreton Bay. The few settlers now located in the District followed Sir Thomas Mitchell's tracks along the Balonne, and, until last year, invariably resorted to Maitland, a distance of from 500 to 700 miles. Mr. Roderick Mitchell was then appointed Commissioner and with the activity and enterprise which have always characterised him, opened up a road into the Darling Downs which brought the most distant parts of the north of this District within 300 miles of water carriage . . . There are great complaints of the depredations of the blacks . . . a few weeks ago they carried off four hundred head of herding cattle

at Mount Abundance and are again round the Station in such large numbers that we expect to hear every day that the whole Station is exterminated. The blacks are living upon cattle only: opossums and fish are quite below their notice. There appears to be much disappointment felt in consequence of efficient assistance not having been given by the Native Police whose presence is said would have prevented a great sacrifice of life and property. It is said that some of the settlers intend to bring their cattle by the newly discovered road to Moreton Bay instead of to Maitland. . . .”

As to the complaints of the settlers against the Native Police, Commandant Walker, in supporting his policy of taking stern measures against the natives only when compelled to do so, pointed out that by the action of the settlers “. . . the blacks . . . were in a manner outlawed in their own country, being hunted from the river and creek frontages and thus deprived of means of lawfully obtaining food. Driven to desperation, they carried on a constant war of retaliation with the whites, and lived solely on cattle . . .”

Gideon S. Lang had, by early 1850, journeyed through the unexplored scrubs of the Maranoa, and in May 1850 he was gazetted as the lessee of lands which, four years later, became Wallumbilla Station located twenty-six miles east of the present Town of Roma. Also in 1850, Mr. Lang applied for a number of leases along the lower Bungil Creek, and on Tchanning Creek. Matthew Goggs applied for, and subsequently became the lessee of, a group of four leases, two of which took in the land which is now the Parish of Roma within the boundaries of which the present Town of Roma is situated.

T. S. Hall, of “Yambougal,” took up and occupied the leases which became “Noorindoo” and “Weribone” Stations, and Joseph Fleming the leases which became “Talavera.” All these Stations were close to Surat. By late 1850 all the land in the Maranoa then explored had been tendered for.

Of the many who took up leases in the Surat-Mount Abundance area, quite a few did not occupy their lands: they waited either to sell their rights, or

for someone else to stock the surrounding country and so make occupation easier. In consequence of the inaction of the lessees, occupation of the Surat-Mount Abundance area was slow during the fifties. The census of March 1, 1851, for the whole of the Maranoa showed a population of eighty-five, and on May 1, 1856 (when the District was larger) only 110.

And so in the year 1850 the Surat-Mount Abundance area had the occupied Stations of Mount Abundance, Yambougal, Noorindoo, Weribone, and Talavera, together with the presence at Surat of the Commissioner of Crown Lands, and perhaps a Constable and Clerk of Petty Sessions, but little else. The nearest mail terminus was Wambo.

Passing now to the year 1859 and looking back over the events since 1850, one finds very little progress either at Surat itself or in the Surat-Mount Abundance area: this appears to have been mainly due to the hostility of the natives. It is recorded that in the early days of Surat the locality "swarmed with natives and the residents had to go armed and with a guard when they went to bring water from the river."

At the instance of Land Commissioner Roderick Mitchell, the Government reserved a frontage of five miles on the Balonne, and from this frontage, in February 1851, a Town Reserve, corresponding generally to the present Surat Town Reserve, was surveyed by Surveyor R. C. Bagot. Such survey was merely of the boundaries of the reserve, no subdivision into allotments and streets being made.

On August 11, 1851, the Government called tenders for the conveyance of mails between Wambo and Surat once a week. On January 5, 1852, a Post Office was officially established at Surat, and about the same time a postal line from Drayton, via Wambo, to Surat was established. However, such postal facility at Surat petered out because the Post Office there was officially re-established on December 26, 1856, following on the establishment in 1855 of a mail line between Callandoon-Drayton-Dalby-Wambo-Surat.

Compulsory registration of births, deaths and marriages came into force in 1856. Present records relating to previous years have been compiled from

Church records and consequently are incomplete as in many cases children were not christened and burials took place without the services of a minister.

In June 1855 Mr. Henry Boyle was appointed Police Magistrate and also Commissioner of Crown Lands for Maranoa, and in the following February he was appointed District Registrar of the Registry District (Births, Deaths and Marriages) of Surat, which latter position he held for about twelve months. The Registry District of Surat comprised "the Pastoral District of Maranoa and part of the Darling Downs."

In the next few years Condamine came into active competition with Surat in regard to public facilities. In 1858 the Police and Registry Districts of Surat were re-named Condamine. In 1860 there were no police stationed at either Surat or Mount Abundance, but Condamine, which then had a population of 124, had a Chief Constable, three ordinary Constables, and a Clerk of Petty Sessions.

As to the Station properties in the Surat-Mount Abundance area during this period, in 1858 Mr. MacPherson returned to Australia on a two-year visit and during his stay he disposed of his pastoral interests in Australia. The sale of Mount Abundance Station to Mr. Stephen Spencer took place in 1857 and the new owner arrived on the property on June 11, 1858, with cattle, but no sheep.

Wallumbilla Station was formed in 1854, and in 1856 it was owned by Mr. W. P. Gordon who, in that year, also held the leases which formed "Tingun Station." In 1856 leases covering fifty miles north of the present site of Roma were acquired from the Crown.

About 1859 John Christian of the Hunter River District purchased the rights to "Tingun Station" and sent his nephew Henry Cardell to the Station as a partner. Cardell re-named Tingun Creek, Blythe's Creek, because Blythe had been speared there, and he (Cardell) named his homestead "Blythedale." John Christian also purchased "Euthulla" and took another nephew — Mr. W. Bassett — as a partner in that property.

At the time Queensland became a separate Colony, the following description was given to the Maranoa:

“Queensland is divided into seven large Districts . . . Maranoa, the third District, lies due west from the Darling Downs. Its eastern boundary is near 149° east longitude and it may be supposed to stretch to the parallel of 141° . Only a small portion of this immense country has been explored and a smaller portion still, taken up by the adventurous squatter. It returns one member to the Queensland Assembly and the Darling Downs returns two. Little therefore is known of the Maranoa: we know, however, that it too is a good pasture country, rewarding the squatter for his labour and expense in driving his flocks far inland. The country is partly hilly and broken; but vast tracts are level, and covered with vegetation of a rich character. Along both banks of the Balonne, and many miles off, there are scrubs of great extent, great beauty, and impenetrable denseness. These dark and dense thickets become the home of wild cattle and form an impregnable stronghold for unfriendly blacks. As yet the Maranoa is destitute of anything in the shape of an agricultural or town population, and, for a long time to come, it will remain the “Squatters’ own” in undisturbed possession.”

The separation of Queensland from New South Wales gave an immense impetus to pastoral interests in the western districts of Queensland. This, coupled with “The Crown Lands Occupation Act of 1860” which made it imperative for holders to stock their lands within a specified period on pain of forfeiture, led to many changes during 1859-1861 in the ownership of Crown leases, followed by actual occupation of the country.

It was said in late 1860, “Settlement is extending rapidly westwards. Messrs. Kennedy, Spencer, and others are stocking all the Maranoa country which, whatever it is now, was in 1854 and 1855 as good a country as a man might see in a year of Sundays.”

As settlement took place, Mount Abundance Station became a central point, and it was in the vicinity of the homestead that roads led N.E. to

Taroom, eastward through "Wallumbilla," "Bendemere," "Dulacca," and "Binbian" to Condamine, southward to Surat, and westward to the Warrego.

The first mail run in the Mount Abundance District was a privately sponsored one from Condamine to Bindango. Stations along the route engaged a man named Lewis for the job.

"Lewis went to the Condamine every fortnight or three weeks. At every stopping place on the way back all the newspapers he carried were opened, read, and tied up again. The people stayed up late into the night in order to read the papers. The owners of the papers never objected. His were regular surprise visits as he never ran to time but dodged along anyhow."

The following report from Condamine appeared in the press on January 31, 1861:

"From the voice of the public clamours loudly a call for a postal line to take the following route—Dulacca, Bendemere, Wallumbilla, Blythe's Creek, Pages, Spencers, Bassetts, Lalors, Donkins, and some Stations of Mr. Kennedy, with the Condamine. These Stations represent upwards of 150,000 sheep besides a large return of cattle and no inconsiderable amount of horse stock. In addition to those already established, Messrs. Mead, Jeffries, Flood, Saddler, Moore, Wilson, and others are on the eve of arriving with more stock. In fact, the line **must** be conceded."

The postal line to Bungeworgorai and a Post Office at Bungeworgorai were established in 1861. A mail went each way once a week by horseback. Mount Abundance Homestead became the District Post Office and Mr. Spencer, Postmaster.

In 1861 the Government formed, as a temporary measure, a Maranoa Police Patrol consisting of an officer and three white troopers, to prevent cattle stealing, sly grog selling, and the introduction into the Maranoa of contraband goods from New South Wales. The members of the patrol were entitled to half the proceeds of sale of confiscated property. Said a newspaper of the day: "The fact is established that contraband goods of considerable value have lately been

imported over the frontier into the Maranoa by certain squatters of the District." The Patrol was distinct from the Native Police.

A press report from Condamine published on January 31, 1861, said:

"One knotty point is at present the favourite topic for discussion down here and that is as to where the site for another Township is to be fixed. No doubt the establishment of a Township and permanent police protection is loudly demanded by the rapidly increasing importance of the Maranoa District, but as every resident of any consequence has an idea it should be laid out exactly to suit him, the Government are likely to be puzzled when they come to seek information on the subject. One party, an influential one, argues that from the lawless state of the Balonne, the Township should be established at some considerable distance from Surat but still on the river. Others, again, argue that as some spot in the neighbourhood of Mount Abundance must, from its natural location, be the centre of a large District, there ought the new Township to be. I can sum the matter up in a few words. Two Townships will very shortly be required. One as a nucleus for the Maranoa District which is destined to eclipse many Districts opened out and settled long 'ere it attained attention: the other on the Balonne River where the salutary influence of a posse of Constables is much to be desired . . ."

Surat at this time was very small, there being only three buildings on the Town Reserve (still Crown land and not surveyed into allotments), namely, a public house, Land Commissioner Macarthur's residence, and Land Commissioner Austin's camp. "Talavera" Station buildings were close by on the west.

In the following year Surat progressed a little. In June 1862 it was reported that "Surat has recently been proclaimed a place for holding Courts of Petty Sessions and a Court House and lock-up, which are most wanted, will doubtless be soon added to our Township."

About mid-1862 Mr. A. C. Gregory, Chief Commissioner of Crown Lands, visited the Mount Abundance area and chose, as a site for a new Town, the

spot where Roma now stands. The progress made by Roma in the following five years placed it ahead of Surat, and so Mount Abundance gained that which was lost to it when Land Commissioner Durbin, in 1849, changed his mind and established his headquarters on the Balonne near T. S. Hall's Station buildings.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION

Salaries of Government Employees and Contractors

The position of Commissioner of Crown Lands for Maranoa carried a salary of £365 per annum when Roderick Mitchell and his successor, Henry Whitty, held it in the years 1849-1856, and £450 per annum when Patrick Macarthur occupied it in 1860. The two troopers assigned to Henry Whitty received 3/6 per day each, and the three troopers assigned to Patrick Macarthur were each paid £185 per annum.

In 1860 the Commandant of the Maranoa Detachment of the Native Police received £300 per annum, his second lieutenant £200 per annum, his two camp sergeants £100 per annum each, and his black troopers 5d. per day each. In 1862 the daily pay of a black trooper was reduced to 3d. In 1862 the officer in charge of the Maranoa Police Patrol received £200 per annum and his white troopers 5/6 per day each plus their share in confiscated contraband goods.

The contractor of the Wambo-Surat mail run (about 120 miles each way) in 1855 received £250 per annum for conveying the mails each way each week on horseback. A similar mail run, between Condamine and Surat (about 100 miles each way), in 1858 carried £150 per annum, and the Condamine-Mount Abundance run (about 120 miles each way) in 1861, £195 per annum.

Roderick Mitchell

Roderick Mitchell worked in the Maranoa until mid-1851 when he was offered the command of an expedition to search for Dr. Leichhardt. Although then only twenty-eight years of age he was a very able man,

and, in addition, he had with him two natives whom he had taught to read and who could speak the tongue of the northern natives into whose territory the expedition was going.

Said a press report published on August 23, 1851:

“Mr. Roderick Mitchell proceeds to Sydney in ‘The Beaver’ for the purpose of purchasing equipment for the party which he is to conduct in search of Dr. Leichhardt. Mr. Mitchell expects to return in about six weeks and to take his departure on his interesting journey as soon as may be expedient after the expected rains have fallen in the ‘Far West.’ A gentleman named Haughton is likely to accompany Mr. Mitchell on his expedition. Mr. Hunter is also to form one of the party. Mr. Hunter, who was a Dragoon and quite famous in frontier warfare, accompanied Mr. Gideon S. Lang on his journey through the unexplored scrub in the Maranoa District . . .”

Whilst at sea “The Beaver” on August 28, 1851, encountered a violent storm during which Roderick Mitchell fell overboard and perished.

Naming of Surat

The Gazette notice of June 18, 1850, announcing that “Surat on the Balonne River” had been appointed a place for holding Courts of Petty Sessions is the earliest reference to “Surat” the writer has been able to locate: nor has he been able to find a record of the name of the person who actually gave Surat its name. It is said Surat was named after the town of the same name in India, but the writer has yet to find proof of this.

R. C. Bagot’s Plan of Survey of a “Town Reserve at Surat” would indicate, as in other cases, that the name “Surat” was first given to the locality as distinct from a Town site. Some localities bore their Town’s name before the Town came into being, e.g., Gazette notices for 1847, 1848, and 1849, calling tenders for the supply of provisions for Government Departments stated (*inter alia*) that those for the Liverpool Plains Police District were to be delivered at “Tamworth”; but it was not until early 1850 that a Gazette notice was published stating that a site had been fixed upon

for a Township (to bear the name of Tamworth) at **Tamworth.**

Identity of W. Ogilby, P.M.

In 1864 a small Committee of the Royal Society of Victoria reported on certain evidence which had been brought forward regarding "White Men's Graves in the Interior." The following statement appeared in the report: "The first tidings of the recorded awful termination of Dr. Leichhardt's enterprises were obtained in 1850 by Mr. W. Ogilby, P.M., at Surat, and Mr. Gideon Lang now of this city, through a black-fellow at Surat."

Who was W. Ogilby, P.M.? If, as we should assume, the report gives the name and title correctly, the entire lack of information, upon enquiry, as to "W. Ogilby, P.M." is rather intriguing.

In support of the accuracy of the statement, and the existence of such a person, it could be said that such a Committee is not likely to have made an error: and that W. Ogilby, P.M., need not necessarily have been a permanent resident of the locality, but could have been a Government official temporarily at Surat in connection with the setting-up of a system of administration of justice, a Chief Constable and a Clerk of Petty Sessions having been appointed, and Surat gazetted as a place for holding Courts of Petty Sessions, during 1850.

Those who might doubt the accuracy of the statement could point to the fact that the report was made fourteen years after the event happened, which lapse of time may have caused errors to creep in: to the lack of information about a man named "W. Ogilby, P.M.", or in fact a Government official by the name of W. Ogilby: that it would be unlikely W. Ogilby was "Post-master" at Surat as in 1850 there was no mail service to that locality: that it is possible the person intended to be named was a member of the Ogilvie family who were interested in pastoral leases in the neighbourhood of Surat, one or more of whom were "Magistrates" but not "Police Magistrates."

And there the matter is now left, with an invitation to some person, at a later date, to give this Society an address on—"W. Ogilby, P.M."