

EARLY SETTLEMENT OF NORTH AND WESTERN QUEENSLAND: ONE FAMILY'S EXPERIENCES

by Neil Yeates

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INTRODUCTION – SOUTH AUSTRALIA (1839-62)

The central figure in this study is Sidney Yeates, the youngest of five children who, with their parents, emigrated to Australia from England in 1839.

Sidney was born in London on 30 August 1831¹ and so was eight years old when the barque *Bardaster* of 435 tons (Capt. John Virtue) anchored at Holdfast Bay in the Colony of South Australia on 18 January 1839. The *Bardaster* had a crew of 13 plus five boys, a second cook and four men being shipped “in lieu of four run away.”² Some passengers travelled cabin and intermediate class but most, including the Yeates and three other families travelled steerage. On arrival they were carried ashore on sailors’ backs at Patawalonga Creek.³

The procedure after landing was to travel by bullock dray to the settlement of Adelaide and establish a camp; and it was during their tent life that the eldest Yeates child, 16-year-old Emily, met her future husband, John Richardson, whom she married in Trinity Church, Adelaide on 12 October 1839. But misfortune struck too during the family’s first year of settlement. A mere three months after arriving in the Colony the father, John Luther Yeates, London lawyer and late Captain the Berkeley Regiment, died of dysentery. His widow, Martha (nee Barr of Henwick Hall, Worcester, England), set up house and established a school for “young ladies and young gentlemen under nine.”⁴ Martha’s home was located on Acre 18 North Terrace, opposite Government House.⁵

The eldest boy, George, obtained employment, while the second girl Fanny was soon old enough to help her mother. After further schooling sons John and Sidney also found jobs. Sidney first worked for a bookseller in King William St at two shillings and six pence per week.⁶ In later years Fanny married Rev James Benny and lived for many years in the Manse at the old John Knox Church, Morphett Vale (S.A.).

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By 1847 George Barr Yeates had progressed well enough in the copper mining town of Burra Burra, some 90 miles north of Adelaide, to venture into sheep farming. This took him to Baldina,⁷ east of the Burra; but when the first Government leases were established on 1 July 1851 George secured two runs at Mt. Remarkable in the South Flinders Ranges. He enlisted his two brothers' aid in running these properties and in 1857, the year in which Sidney married, the 67 sq.m. lease of Baroota was transferred to John and Sidney, while George, who had married in 1854, retained Wild Dog Creek, a 27 sq.m. run on part of which Murray Town later arose. Wild Dog Creek was of gently undulating terrain; but Baroota occupied the rugged western slopes of the Flinders Range and was dissected by deep gorges with only a narrow strip of coastal plain on the Spencer Gulf side of the run. The summit of Mt. Remarkable (3146 ft.) formed the N-E boundary of Baroota and features within the lease such as Mambray Creek, Alligator Creek, Hidden Gorge and the Battery are now well-known tourist attractions in what has become Mr. Remarkable National Park.

The rugged terrain made sheep handling difficult, while the only feasible direct route across the range from Baroota to the east, including to Wild Dog Creek was a bridle track round the southern side of Mt. Remarkable, at the foot of what is now called Gibraltar Rock. Exit to the west, however, was less difficult and the wool clip is said to have been taken by bullock team to the adjacent shore of Spencer Gulf.⁸ There, at Germein Bay, the bales were loaded on to a flat-bottomed barge, which was beached for the purpose at high tide and later floated out to a waiting ship.

On a visit to Yongala station Sidney met his future bride, Dymphna Cudmore, daughter of Daniel Michael Paul Cudmore and Mary (nee Nihill). The two were married in 1857 at Pinda – another of Daniel Cudmore's runs near Mt. Remarkable. The future township of Melrose, at the eastern foot of Mt. Remarkable was then little more than a police depot and a resting point for travellers; there was no church until 1864, when Holy Trinity was built.

Despite the work of developing their runs and their increasing parental responsibilities, both George and Sidney were among the first Justices of the Peace appointed at Mt. Remarkable.⁹ This pattern of participation in community affairs was to be maintained throughout their later lives.

By 1862, amid the clamour for closer settlement and the consequent uncertainty that their 14-year leases would be renewed, the three brothers decided to sell out and try their fortunes in country then being opened up in north Queensland. Accordingly they sold Baroota to William Salter for a sum representing the price of 10,000 sheep at

£1 per head, with the lease and station improvements (valued at £1124) being given in. The improvements comprised “five stone, two gum slab, and four pine huts . . . on the run; and, at the head station, a six roomed pine house . . . Overseer’s house, woolshed, five pine huts, smith’s shop . . . stockyards.”¹⁰

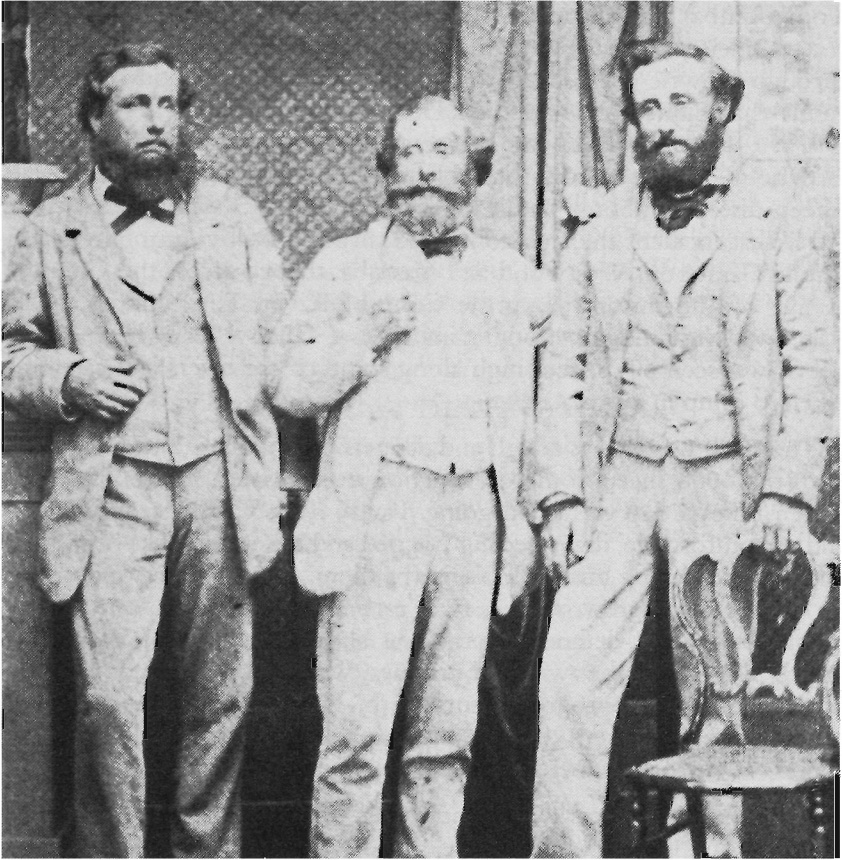
A nearby gravestone tells that a Salter child died in 1863 and the great drought of the mid-sixties in South Australia “unprecedented before or since”¹¹ was soon to follow.

EINASLEIGH RIVER, NORTH QLD. (1863-67)

If the Yeates brothers’ exodus was well timed in relation to the drought, there were hardships and many adventures in store for them. Making arrangements for their wives and families to remain temporarily in South Australia, George, John and Sidney, taking enough equipment to start a settlement, left Adelaide by the 374-ton barque *Sorata*, bound first for Port Jackson. Thereafter their northward journey was overland. Accompanying them were their two nephews, John and Frederick Richardson, George Agars (husband of Dymphna Yeates’ sister), Samuel Powell (Mrs George Yeates’ brother), Frank Gardiner (a relative of one of the Cudmores) and others: shepherds, a man named Low and George Yeates’ “faithful blackboy Warry” are mentioned in accounts of their later travels;¹² and Sam Pilton is referred to in one of Fred Richardson’s letters.¹ (The N.S.W. shipping records show that the *Sorata*’s cabin passengers included the three Yeates brothers and the two Richardsons, while “Mr Warrie” travelled steerage).

After spending Christmas 1862 in the vicinity of Port Jackson, the party started out on a trek that was to last a year and take most of them into the watershed of the Gulf of Carpentaria. George and Sidney’s goal was an aggregation of runs at the junction of the Einasleigh and Copperfield Rivers, both part of the Gilbert River system. (At that time, however, the Einasleigh was mistakenly called the Lynd – see later¹³). It is clear on two counts that George Yeates had already inspected and indeed claimed these runs: first, he gave “glowing reports of running streams and the El Dorado in front of them;”¹² and second, a Peel River Land and Mineral Co (P.R.L.&M.Co.) report dated October 1862 tells of Messrs. McMaster, McDonald and Yeates having described their respective blocks in the Gilbert basin as “first-class sheep country and very well watered.”¹⁴

Before leaving Sydney the party arranged the purchase of stock and equipment from P.R.L.&M.Co., delivery to be taken at Goonoo Goonoo, near Tamworth. In addition they bought horses, stores and equipment at West Maitland, en route to Tamworth. The P.R.L.&M.Co. ledger (pp206-7), now in the A.N.U. Archives, shows that at Goonoo Goonoo George and Sidney purchased 4245 sheep, a stallion named Caesar Augustus, two drays and 16 bullocks; and that a



The Yeates brothers from left: John, George and Sidney in 1862, at the start of their 1700 mile overland trek to North Queensland.

deposit was paid on other sheep, to be collected further north at company properties, including Ellangowan on the Darling Downs. The total outlay was £3033.11.0. Stores were also replenished at Tamworth, specific items mentioned being two tons of flour, much salt and two trusses of pressed hay.

The rations were “plain” consisting mostly of salt beef and damper, but everyone had first-class appetites.¹² Eight or more of the party, leading a horse each, would ride on ahead. At night, each leader took three hours’ watch. Heavy and continuous rain was encountered in the vicinity of the Liverpool Ranges and the journey through New England was rough, with little more than a bridle track to guide them in places. They passed through Glen Innes and Tenterfield, thence via Warwick and Ellangowan across the Darling Downs, reaching Drayton on 31 March 1863.

At that time the nearest stations to Drayton (the fore-runner of Toowoomba) were Eton Vale, Westbrook and Gowrie. When Sidney Yeates, Henry Richardson and Frank Gardiner were taking the sheep through Gowrie they failed to notify the local authorities, with the result that Sidney was fined in Drayton Police Court. The *Darling Downs Gazette* described the charge as “driving a mob of sheep across Gowrie Road ... an unmistakable offence during the present scab [sheep disease] hubbub” and Sidney was fined £5 with £2.2.0 costs. After that incident the trek continued through Dalby, Jimbour, Jinghi Jinghi, Camboon, Westwood and Yaamba; thence across the Connors Range and northward along the Connors River. The country at this stage was very boggy, flood rains having fallen everywhere. Flood debris was seen 60-70 feet high along some of the rivers and care was taken to camp in safe places.

The track was always rough and dangerous. Rivers had to be crossed with the 6000 sheep, some of which were drowned. Travelling eight to ten miles a day was good going. Rainy days, with everything wet and uncomfortable, drays getting bogged and upset, bullocks being lost and men becoming bushed looking for them, caused anxiety and delay. As the country grew wilder, two carbines were given out to the shepherds for self-defence. Warry was always watchful and knew in which directions the wild Aborigines were located. And so they continued to make progress – turning N-N-W to Nebo, Mackay and Port Denison (Bowen), having then travelled almost 1500 miles by inland route from Sydney.

Very few travellers were met, but once a pleasant man, well mounted and leading a pack horse, asked if he could join the party for company. He made himself useful and was a pleasant companion, so all were sorry to find, on waking up one morning, that he had disappeared. Later that day troopers rode up asking for a man of his description: he was one of the most dangerous bushrangers in the country.

On reaching Port Denison in late 1863, John Yeates left the party. He had secured two runs, aggregating 75 sq.m., situated on Edgecumbe Bay, some 25 miles south of Bowen. These he stocked with sheep – but instead of living on the newly acquired country, he established his residence in Bowen where his wife and family joined him. At this time also, 18 newly surveyed farms on the Don River became available. George Agars bought Nos. 6 & 7, while Sidney Yeates secured Farms 8 & 9 in his wife’s name.¹⁵ The 80-acre blocks each had a frontage to the east bank of the river.

But George and Sidney still had far to travel. Their sheep had become wormy and they sold portion of their flock for £1 per head, taking some cattle from Mr Hann of Bluff Downs as part payment.

(According to Bolton,¹³ Joseph Hann was drowned in the Burdekin River in 1864, after which his son William ran Bluff Downs until 1870). The journey north-west from Bowen to the Einasleigh was through rough virgin bush, and as the Aborigines were described as “numerous and unfriendly,” carbines were issued to the men for self protection.¹² Far out from civilisation the party met a man named John Barnfather, a recent arrival from England. He was invited to come over to the Yeates’ camp later that day but he failed to appear. A search was started and he was found dead next day – believed killed by the Aborigines. A report was later furnished to the police. When travelling in this region the party would make a fire and have tea before sunset, then travel on a few more miles and camp. They dared not light a fire at night for fear of the Aborigines.

ARRIVAL AT DESTINATION

Far up the Burdekin the travellers met James Cudmore, Dymphna Yeates’ eldest brother, on his way back to Adelaide. He had stocked some country further up the river – probably Niall which Daniel Cudmore (snr.) had selected prior to 1863.¹⁶

At last the Yeates party reached their destination. A vivid impression of the trek is given in a letter, written years later (1909) by F.G. Richardson to his uncle, Sidney Yeates.¹ An extract follows:–

I have often been going to write to you . . . I know I would not be out of your memory for the long Queensland journey of 1800 miles is not easily erased from the mind. I see Sam Pilton every few years and the events of that journey are still fresh in his memory. We often shared the same blanket, as you and I shared the same tent. I have travelled many a thousand miles inland since those days and have had many a hard camp in the North and West and have been twice round the world. But that great Queensland trip and later experience still remains the event of my life . . .

The country which George had selected, named and registered on behalf of “George Barr Yeates and Sidney Yeates of Bowen,” is described in the Qld. Archives.¹⁷ It comprised three adjoining runs: Mopata, 70 sq.m.; Red Rock 80 sq.m.; and Myall Downs, 100 sq.m. Two other blocks, Baroota and Mamberra (the latter presumably a corruption of Mambray) had also been applied for but were evidently allowed to lapse. The three leases which they did retain were consolidated into one station which they called Myall Downs. The official descriptions of the runs include references to the river Lynd; but a footnote explains that “this river is now called the Einasleigh and is found to be a tributary of the Gilbert.” The historian Bolton also points out that the Einasleigh was at first thought to be Leichhardt’s Lynd.¹³ There were only two stations further west than Myall Downs: the McKinnon’s and the McDonald’s. Another nearby station was Carpentaria Downs, owned by a Mr. Stenhouse.

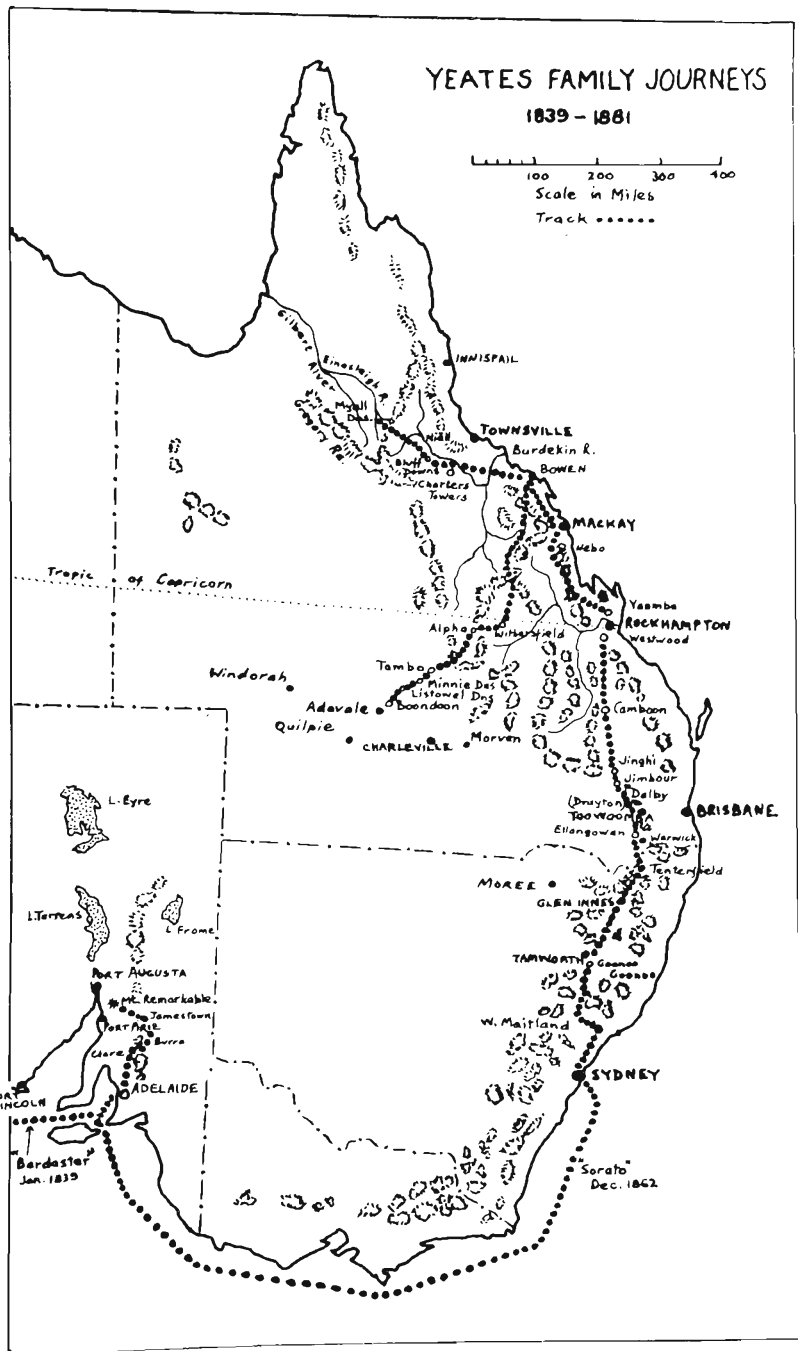
In March 1864 the Brisbane *Courier*, reporting northern news of two months earlier (thus indicating the difficulties of communication), included a paragraph headed “New Stations Formed”. This mentioned that Mr. Donald McDonald from South Australia had formed a sheep camp about 16 miles west of Mr. McKinnon’s, on the Copperfield River a branch of the Lynd [Einasleigh]. The article continued:–

“Messrs. G.B. and S. Yeates have established with sheep and cattle on Myall Downs, at the junction of the Copperfield and Lynd [Einasleigh]. Any amount of runs are ready for squatters north and west. Cartage and labour are the present drawbacks . . .”.

Within weeks of the Yeates’ party establishing their camp, tragedy overtook the McDonald family. The McDonalds had not long come from World’s End station near the Burra in South Australia, when, on 27 January 1864 Mr. McDonald was speared and killed. The circumstances of his death were described in considerable detail some five weeks later in the *Port Denison Times* of 5 March 1864.

George and Sidney Yeates persevered against heavy odds – but only for three years. There was no demand for fat cattle other than for the boiling down works at Cardwell on the coast, and that meant driving the cattle at least 120 miles over lonely country to the north-east. Sheep farming, too, was difficult and unprofitable, partly because of the spear grass and tropical climate, but above all because of the hostile Aborigines. Reliable shepherds were hard to obtain under the prevailing conditions, and, as stated by Bolton¹³ none of the northern stations payed – original pioneers being obliged either to sell, or simply walk off. But perhaps the real turning point came when Sidney contracted malaria. This, indeed, is stated as the reason for disposing of Myall Downs in Sidney Yeates’ obituary some 51 years later.¹⁸

The two Yeates brothers sold the lease of Myall Downs in 1867. George then appears to have accompanied Sidney to Bowen briefly. However, George soon left Queensland and took over Tullich station near Casterton in Victoria. Problems of foot-rot and scab in his sheep drove him from there back to South Australia and he devoted the rest of his life to public service and church interests in Jamestown. He is honoured by a memorial window in the Anglican church of St. James the Great, Jamestown; and local newspapers of the time testify to his community service. In 1902, at the age of 78, he felt the need for a rest and resigned as Town Clerk. A meeting of Jamestown Corporation accepted his resignation on 23 June of that year, and with cries of “hear, hear” a motion was unanimously adopted that “a letter recognising and acknowledging the faithful service given to the town during the past 21 years by Mr Yeates should be sent to their old friend.”¹⁹



The Family Journeys, 1839-1881.

George Barr Yeates died three months later, predeceasing his wife Louisa Rebecca (nee Powell) by 17 years. She was the daughter of Thomas William Powell, at whose house the McDouall Stuart party spent their last night in beds en route to the Gulf of Carpentaria,¹² and after whom the explorer named Powell Creek in the Northern Territory on 19 June 1862.²⁰ There were seven children of the marriage and, at the time of George's death, 23 grand-children.⁷

BOWEN, QLD. (1863-70's)

During George and Sidney Yeates' Myall Downs venture, John Swift Haigh Yeates had become very much a part of the community life of Bowen. By 1864 he had stocked his two runs, Maralda and Longford the leases of which were eventually gazetted on 15 December that year. Longford was named after the birthplace of his wife Matilda (nee Palmer) near Sevenoaks in Kent, England and the present settlement of Longford Creek on the Bruce Highway retains the name.

In 1863, when John arrived, Bowen was in its third year of settlement. Mackay (1862) was founded more than a year after Bowen, and Townsville was not proclaimed until July 1865.¹³ Bowen's early establishment owed much to its fine natural harbour, which was a special asset when sea travel was so heavily relied upon. By 1864 the population was a mere 450 and the "streets" were nothing more than a network of tracks which the Town Council was endeavouring to clear of stumps. On 5 March 1864 the first issue of the *Port Denison Times* appeared. That same year a public meeting was called to press for a jetty for which the Government in Brisbane agreed to provide £10,000; a school house and teacher were promised if £200 could be raised locally; and the first offering of "country lots (Crown land) near Bowen" was announced – the price being £1 per acre.

But with the progress there were problems and complaints. The water supply was criticised, especially when Council decided to levy threepence per cask on all water taken from the Corporation reservoir. The *P.D. Times* (17 Sep 1864) described the Corporation water as

“. . . none the best. In colour it is decidedly greenish, and in quality opaque . . . If the town depended on this water hole alone, the town would soon die of thirst. At present most of the water is taken from the native wells on the beach, and though at times slightly brackish, it is on the whole far clearer and purer than that in the reservoir and is only half the price . . .”

There was also continuing strife over the jetty. First the citizens disagreed over its exact location, then there were allegations of improper tendering procedures, and finally, during construction, arguments arose over the rates of pay for day labourers. An unhappy aspect of those times, too, was the frequency of pilfering and theft. Hardly an

issue of the paper appeared without somebody advertising the loss of property and offering a reward for its return. John Yeates had his share of this trouble – and for the return of a stolen or strayed horse he usually offered ten shillings reward. But more important was damage and loss sustained on his run, about which a reward of £20 was offered – a princely sum in those days.

In October 1865 Sir George Ferguson Bowen, Governor of the Colony visited the town bearing his name and a levee was held. John Yeates was listed, along with a good many others, as “Gentlemen presented to His Excellency”. But despite Vice-Regal interest in Bowen, local feelings were strong about the alleged neglect of north Queensland by the Brisbane bureaucracy and a Northern Separation League was formed. John subscribed to that in July 1866; and in the following month he was elected to a committee set up to “secure the return of George Elphinstone Dalrymple, Esq. as Colonial Secretary.” Meanwhile, despite increasing public commitments John’s business and home life proceeded normally: he advertised separately for sale “a first class wool dray but little used” and sheep of mixed ages and sexes. He shipped wool and skins to the south, and his wife sought “a female servant”.

As John Yeates was clearly becoming more prominent in the community, it is not too surprising that when the annual Town Council elections came due in February 1867 he was nominated. More nominations than places were received, so an election was necessary. Accordingly, a meeting of ratepayers was called to hear the views and policies of each candidate. At that meeting (*P. D. Times* 6 Feb 1867) J. S. H. Yeates said he would work towards betterment of the roads. “There is scarcely a wool dray that comes in, or one of stores that goes out, that does not get stuck up at one of the two swamps . . .”. He also wanted something done about the town’s water supply. He suggested the construction of an aqueduct from the Don River – something which he had investigated.

Polling was conducted a few days later and from a field of seven MacLeod (96 votes) topped the poll, with Yeates (93) second. At the first meeting of Council, called to elect a Mayor, Alderman MacLeod nominated Alderman Yeates as “a fit and proper person to be Mayor of this Council”. The motion was seconded and Yeates was elected; but another alderman had been nominated and the atmosphere of the meeting suggested an under-current of sectionalism. This was to surface later in the year.

With John Yeates no doubt immersed in his new duties, a severe setback came three months later, when his sheep runs were attacked by Aborigines. The *P. D. Times* of 1 June 1867 reported as follows:

On Wednesday evening news was brought to town that the blackfellows had rushed Mr. Yeates' coast station and murdered a shepherd. We have received the following particulars:- The murdered man (Joseph Peate) . . . was hut-keeping and had charge of a flock of 34 rams. His mate, the shepherd, was away with the main flock and on his return found Peate's body within 50 yards of the hut. He had one spear wound and marks of blows on the head – apparently inflicted with a tomahawk. His body was stripped. The rams had been driven away and the hut plundered. . . The shepherd immediately left and made . . . his way to a neighbouring station, where he gave information of what had occurred.

The editorial column of the paper followed this up a week later:-

The destruction at Mr. Yeates' station, in addition to the loss of a valuable human life, is something fearful in its very wantonness. The sheep are lying in heaps barbarously slain and numbers of dilly bags were found . . . filled with mutton fat . . . It is folly to suppose that people will invest their capital in a place where there is so little security . . . and the shameful want of adequate protection to our settlers is another reason why we should cut the painter . . . [this referred to the movement for the independence of North Queensland from Brisbane domination].

In an attempt to recover some recompense for his loss, John instructed a solicitor to petition the Colonial Secretary for reimbursement. The original document, written in copper-plate hand and signed by John, is held by the Qld. Archives. Unfortunately, however, John's imaginative attempt to gain some redress was unavailing. As though this were not enough trouble for John, he sustained another great loss of sheep – 700 being dispersed and destroyed by the Aborigines on 14 July 1867. In a petition dated 24 Aug 1867 John again sought Government recompense, this time addressing his request to Members of the House of Assembly;²¹ but again his efforts were fruitless.

In addition to John Yeates' personal problems, trouble arose among some of the council aldermen. Relationships were so strained that Council sought advice from Brisbane, making use of the newly installed telegraph. Brisbane replied that as Bowen was now a municipality it should solve its own problems. The outcome was that two public meetings were held, on 25 September and 9 October, at which resolutions were passed calling on the aldermen to resign. Each of them agreed to do so, provided all the others did likewise; and this in fact happened. Another election was held and John Yeates was one of the six aldermen elected from nine contenders. However, this time Mr. MacLeod (John's nominator on the previous occasion) became Mayor.

Other activities of John Yeates during succeeding years were close association with the recently established Bowen Primary School, of which he was a Patron from 1868 to 1874; election to the Kennedy Hospital Board; appointment as a Warden of Trinity Church; and occasional calls to act as chairman at public meetings called by rate-payers.

John Yeates and Matilda, whom he married in 1861 when she was only 17 years old, had at least nine children. The youngest four or five of them were born in Adelaide after John and Matilda's eventual return to South Australia. John Yeates died at Eastwood, South Australia on 5 September 1906, aged 78 years. Two of his grandsons were honoured in later years for their public service: Frank Arthur Yeates, O.B.E., of Perth and the late John Norman Yeates, C.B.E., of Adelaide, who had been Highways Commissioner.

DON RIVER AND BOWEN, QLD. (1867-1880)

When Sidney Yeates returned to Bowen from Myall Downs in 1867 he set up the family home on the west bank of the Don River, naming this farm Melrose after the settlement near their old South Australian run. He then took up more leases; and after paying rent for the required period (generally 6-10 years), he exercised his option of conversion to freehold. A register in the Qld. Archives shows that he acquired these leases in stages between 1868 and 1873, eventually purchasing all the blocks, making three separate farms: Melrose, 310 acres; Marshmead, 616 acres; Dundee, 1736 acres (see map). The two portions comprising Dundee were on either side of Yeates Creek which forms the boundary between the Parishes of Dargin and Ben Lomond. Today the Bruce Highway and the main N-S railway cross Yeates Creek about 25 km. south of Bowen. Sidney also acquired the leases of Maralda and Longford in 1868²² – no doubt to the great relief of his brother John who had experienced so many troubles with them.

After settling on the Don, Sidney Yeates started to play a part in community affairs. In February 1868 he became a member of the Kennedy Hospital Committee. Then in 1870 he took responsibility for officially supervising the stocking regulations of the Bowen Town Common. Only licensed persons were permitted to depasture stock on the common (carriers' working bullocks and travelling stock excepted) and an annual fee of two shillings a head was payable. A press announcement dated 4 June 1870 stated that Sidney Yeates, acting as Inspector, would be available in the Council Chambers each Saturday morning to transact business and enter brands.

During this time, too, Sidney Yeates was both receiving stores and sending away produce by sea. Vessels frequently mentioned in the press reports were the *Boomerang*, *Tinonee* and *Black Swan*. He also suffered

stock losses. Much later, *The P. D. Times* carried two “found” notices – rarities indeed. Both originated from the Yeates household. Albert Yeates, one of Sidney’s sons, informed readers that the owner of a Scotch Collie sheep dog could have it by paying expenses; and Sidney said the same about a grey draught horse. Sidney evidently possessed a good sense of humour, for on one occasion he inserted a press notice stating that: “All persons cutting and removing timber and manure, or otherwise trespassing on Selection Nos 111, 135 will be promptly introduced to his Worship the P.M.’s morning levée, Bowen.”

The busiest non-farming venture taken on by Sidney was to set up, with his neighbours’ support and with Brisbane departmental approval, Melrose Provisional School.²³ Sidney’s initial letter of request was dated 4 September 1873 and the school opened in a “rough slab building about 15 x 10” on Sidney’s land, on 5 May 1874. In a family letter dated 19 June 1874 to his brother-in-law, Daniel H. Cudmore, Sidney included news of the school:²⁴

Eight of the children [Sidney’s] are now attending school. I find cottage and school-room and have a very good master, married with one boy. The Education Board, Brisbane pay salary £50 and scholars about 1/- each per week. My share last month came to £1.8.0. The Board find books.

Other news in the same letter from Sidney was that:

The *Lady Douglas* has arrived with 220 immigrants with few exceptions a drunken saucy lot, £30 a year and rations, nothing less. I thought would be useless sending any up to Avoca [D. Cudmore’s sugar plantation on the Herbert River] and be no use in bush work . . . As the Myalls used to prig sheep when not allowed about here I am now trying them in lambing and shepherding and so far doing very well . . .

Melrose Provisional School had a roll-call of 19 and was regularly reported on by inspectors.²³ The teacher was stated to be a quiet, steady person with whom the parents were pleased. His residence was referred to as a small house with garden attached, placed at his disposal by Mr. Yeates. A later report described Melrose as “a very promising provisional school in somewhat rough quarters” . . . and later still, “Bark roof of schoolroom leaks and should be repaired or replaced.” Melrose Provisional School remained in use for 19 years till its closure on 31 March 1893. One teacher who stayed for 16 months resigned “because of the extreme solitude of my situation.”

Sidney Yeates practised diversified farming, with thought to the size, soil type and terrain of his holdings.¹ Apart from sheep, which he most likely ran on Maralda and Longford, he maintained 150 head of dairy

cattle, including 30 milkers on Dundee, and used the riverside flats on Melrose and Marshmead for cropping, horticulture and intensive animal production. During the mid to late 1870's he or Bowen agent T. K. Horsey acting on his behalf, advertised a great range of products including pure-bred Berkshire pigs, fat steers, a draught colt, poultry including table ducks, English potatoes, maize, bananas, pineapples, paw paws and apples. No doubt by then Sidney's older children were playing a part in this production and equally clearly the nutritional needs of the whole family were being well met.

Sidney Yeates and his family appear to have had no problems with the Aborigines on Maralda and Longford, nor for that matter on any of their other holdings in Bowen or elsewhere. The extract from Sidney's letter, quoted earlier, shows that he cooperated with them, and all other evidence indicates that he and his family were on good, even sometimes friendly terms with them.

On 29 March 1879 a public meeting of those interested in forming a Pastoral and Agricultural Association was held in the Bowen School of Arts. The meeting was chaired by the Mayor, and when a list of 72 subscribers was read the decision was made to hold Bowen's first show. Sidney Yeates, one of 12 committee-men, was also elected to a sub-committee of five, whose task was to draw up by-laws and a programme. He was also appointed steward of the cattle, sheep, goat and pig sections. The show was held on 24 September 1879 and pronounced "an unqualified success" by the P. D. *Times*. In the list of results "Mr. S. Yeates" figured prominently, winning a silver medal for the best pen of five ewes or wethers; a silver medal for the best ram; being highly commended for Roots and commended for Fresh Butter and for Bacon.

Sidney Yeates' next community commitment came in February 1880 with his election by the rate-payers of the District of Wangaratta to its newly constituted Board, and at the first meeting he was one of the three elected to the finance committee. Sidney's acceptance of these positions suggests that he had become truly settled; but before the year was out he decided to move with his wife and family to Boondoon, a station near Adavale in the Warrego district of south-west Queensland. Family notes leave little doubt that Daniel Cudmore (senior) had an influence on Sidney's decision.¹ Daniel already had property interests in the Warrego and, as the Boondoon lease was offering, a partnership in that station was agreed upon. Sidney, like so many pastoral pioneers, had proved in the hard school of experience that sheep were unsuited to the coastal environment – and wool growing was what he still desired to pursue. He also probably felt that with his large family growing up, more scope was needed than the small holdings and poor markets of Bowen provided.

The P. D. *Times* of 18 September 1880 advertised a clearing sale at Mr. Horsey's auction mart of the dairy stock and farm implements on Dundee; and announced that tenders would be received from persons desirous of leasing for seven years the properties Melrose, Marshmead and Dundee, descriptions of which were given. Perhaps Sidney thought he might one day return – but he never did. And as the advertisements appeared only once, satisfactory disposals were evidently effected.

On 2 October 1880 the editorial column of the P. D. *Times* said:

We are sorry to lose Mr. Sidney Yeates, one of our oldest and most energetic settlers, who has taken up a sheep station in the Warrego District. Mr. Yeates, his brother and some other South Australians arrived here about 1864, intending to enter upon sheep farming, but finding the country unsuitable for that industry most of them returned to South Australia. Mr. Yeates went in for farming on the Don, but not finding sufficient market here for that kind of produce he resolved to relinquish it and try wool again. Mr. Yeates is a public spirited man and looks ahead, which many of us neglect to do . . . Mr. Yeates will be a great loss to the district.

On 15 October 1880, with the remaining sheep flock mustered and the younger children put aboard the wagons with their mother, Sidney (then aged 49) and his eldest sons guided the large family with their household possessions out on to the stock route and headed into the south-west. Another pioneering venture had begun.

BOONDOON STATION & ADAVALE (1881-1894)

The party which embarked on the 700-mile journey to the Warrego comprised Sidney, his wife Dymphna and 10 of their 12 children, including one daughter, Mary. (The elder girl, Florence, and one boy, Daniel, were then living at Claremont, Glen Osmond, Adelaide with Mr. and Mrs. D. M. P. Cudmore: Daniel to attend school and Florence as Mrs. Cudmore's companion. The diary²⁵ which Flora Yeates kept for the Cudmores during her four years and 10 months' stay gives great insight into the Adelaide life of that period, a century ago).

Transportation to Boondoon included covered wagons and a total of 24 working bullocks. The two eldest boys, Sidney James (22) and Albert (20) drove a bullock team each, while the sheep, numbering 1200, were in the care of Edwin (18) and Walter (11), assisted by a good sheep dog named Hansom. Edwin rode a saddle horse but Walter walked most of the way – only sometimes riding on a pack horse on top of the swags. It is presumed that the younger children rode in a wagon with Dymphna and that Mary (15) helped her mother to manage them. They were: Charles (9), Alfred (8), Gilbert (6), Kenneth (4) and Herbert (1).

When camp was made each evening the children slept in the wagons, while Dymphna and Sidney occupied a 10 x 12 tent in which they arranged a mattress and bedding. They also carried sheet iron as an added protection in case of extremely wet weather. They were never short of milk on the journey as "a milch cow travelled with them."²⁶ The route taken was via Withersfield, the Drummond Range and Alpha station to Tambo; thence south-west through Minnie Downs and Listowel Downs to Blackwater Creek. They followed the latter to within 12 miles of Adavale, then struck east about seven miles to Boondoon homestead, where they arrived on 2 February 1881. The journey had taken 110 days, hence they averaged just over six miles a day. Unfortunately Boondoon was then in the grip of drought and one early requirement was to cart water three miles from a permanent rock hole to the homestead on Brigalow Creek.

The consolidated run known as Boondoon, on which Sidney and his family settled in 1881 totalled 553 sq.m. and comprised the two adjoining leases of Boondoon in the south and Mentone in the north. The price paid for the run was £10,000, with 3000 cattle included; but there were practically no fences. The new partnership traded as Cudmore, Yeates & Co., with the leases being in the Cudmore name and Sidney Yeates being resident partner-manager.¹

After a brief settling-in period, Sidney and his older sons "converted the station into a sheep run and set to work fencing." The latter involved felling swathes of the abundant timber, mostly mulga and gidyea, in long straight runs down the whole length of each fence line. This was all done with the axe. Then, as work progressed, the fallen scrub was laid tree on tree in parallel, to make a thick brush type fence quite impassable by sheep. Because of the durability of the wood, many of those old fences remain – weathered, burnt and decaying, but clearly identifiable after 100 years. Even where fires have burnt the wood, the line of the fence is recognisable by the mound of ash and earth remaining. And from the air, whether the fence has been burnt or not, the fence lines are identifiable by the changed pattern of vegetation along the track of the long-felled scrub.²⁷ The pattern so defined conforms closely to the boundary shown on the Lands Department map of the property, following the first survey of the area in February 1884 using "theodolite and perambulator."²⁸

Since no one is believed to have run sheep on Boondoon before or after the Yeates' occupation, it must be presumed that all the sheep facilities were installed by them. Present-day relics around the woolshed area testify to the work which went into erecting the buildings and transporting the heavy machinery. For example, in the wind-blown, red sandy soil there stands a huge iron wool dumper with the maker's name on its side: H. H. Mortimer & Co, London & Birming-

ham. Beside it lies a heavy iron winding device, and nearby are piles of old hand shears, iron rings from the hubs of wagon wheels, parts of camp ovens and the like. A large stone fire-place or oven marks the site of what was probably the shearers' bakehouse, and the rammed stone and clay floors of the wool-shed and shearers' quarters are still clearly definable. These relics and the ground dimensions of the former buildings, taken in conjunction with Boondoon's stocking capacity are in keeping with the sheep numbers having been "up to 45,000" in the later years of the Yeates' occupancy.²⁶

Valuation for rental re-assessment was carried out in 1886 and the improvements in the wool-shed area were relatively high: double those of the head station house and yards. An out-station dwelling house, kitchen, store and stockyard were also listed, plus another out-station hut and yards; otherwise the improvements to that date consisted mostly of watering facilities (tanks and dams) and fencing. Included within the woolshed precincts were "... a wool scouring shed ... engine shed ... and a fenced drying ground ..."¹ which indicates that the Yeates washed their sheep (in Boondoon Creek) and, if necessary, scoured the shorn wool too. The latter is supported by family notes stating that Walter Yeates "often drove the steam engine ... to dry the wool," this being achieved centrifugally, much like with a modern spin-drier.¹

In addition to the station's work programme, the education of the younger children had to be organised. This involved appointing a governess and, despite the isolation, there seems to have been little difficulty in finding good governesses over the years. Certainly all the children received excellent educations and learnt how to conduct themselves. This says much, not only for the governesses, but for Sidney and Dymphna's insistence on good behaviour. Because of the latter it seems that Dymphna was known in certain quarters as "the Duchess".¹ And of Sidney it has been written that:²⁹

... with his large family of ten sons on the station at Boondoon, he saw to it that in the home, the courtesies and refinements in which he had been reared should be preserved. "Go out to the mulga" he would say, the unfailing remedy for noise inside ...

Each Sunday on Boondoon, Sidney Yeates held a short religious service for the family and the station employees. Everyone dressed in their best clothes for this, the ladies in white. The service was held before the mid-day meal which was always a rather special one.

In due course Sidney Yeates turned his thoughts once more to community affairs. He was sworn in as a Justice of the Peace on 4 April 1884³⁰ and for the next 10 years he discharged "the onerous duties of court work at great personal inconvenience."¹⁸ The Adavale police reports of 1881-91 (Qld. Archives) show both the need for such help



Richard Yeates, great-grandson of Sidney Yeates, stands beside fire-place ruins at old hut on Boondoon. Note the deep slots in the gidyea posts, into which the tapered ends of the horizontally laid slabs fitted.

and the variety of cases on which the bench of justices had to deliberate.

During the 1880's and early 1890's there were many serious industrial disturbances among the shearers in the Warrego district. Strikes and picketing of some stations occurred, but there were few cases of violence. Milo station, which adjoined Boondoon on the west, came in for much trouble of this type but Boondoon was not affected. It is said¹ that Sidney Yeates had good relations with the shearers. On 25 July 1884 the Adavale police officer made application for more police "to help with the Milo shearers' strike." Then much later, 30 April 1891, but again during a serious industrial confrontation, an injury to troop horse Rattler was reported "whilst Tracker Charlie was riding him through the bush tracking offenders who had set fire to Gumbardo woolshed". (Gumbardo adjoined Boondoon to the south).

By no means all the troubles were due to industrial disputes. On 26 August 1887 the police went with Milo's manager, Mr. Pegler, to paddock No. 1 where they "found certain men . . . [one] alias 'Terrible Billy' in possession of a mob of horses that had faked brands . . .". Terrible Billy was arrested and an accomplice was served with a summons. A mere two days later Constable Jackson investigated a light

at the rear of the Imperial Hotel, Adavale at 12.30 o'clock a.m. and "saw drinks supplied". Constable Jackson was "clutched by the throat with one hand by [name given] and struck a severe blow in the eye with the other clenched fist, said fist having a ring on".

Over the years an incredible number and variety of crimes, petty misdemeanours, suicides, discoveries of bodies and strange incidents occurred in Adavale and the surrounding district. It must be remembered that in those days Adavale was a busy centre of trade, a depot for Cobb & Co. and an important junction for the teamsters. The 1886 census gave the town's resident population as 156, and the 1889 Queensland Post Office Directory listed 31 pastoral names (families), the last being "Yeates Brothers, Squatters." The town was recorded as being "613 miles from Brisbane; rail to Charleville, thence coach 130 miles." The coach trip from Charleville to Adavale and Boondoon necessitated crossing the Ward and Langlo Rivers.

A particularly informative article about Adavale, its district and the hospitality of the people as they were in 1891 was written by a traveller at that time.³¹ A brief extract follows:

At Adavale we met some very fine people, whom it is a pleasure to remember: A. H. Pegler of Milo; E. B. Learmonth of Gumbardo; the Yeates family of Boondoon; some of the Tullys of Ray station; Charles McLean of Comongin; Duncan McNeill then the Shire Clerk; Alford who was at Pinkilla. In the town there were Mr. & Mrs. Dare at the Post & Telegraph office; T. Skinner, a storekeeper; Charles Fitzwalter of the big Western firm; Stewart Gibson who loved a good horse . . . Woodhatch of the principal hotel; and Taylor of the Blackwater Hotel. The Adavale folk were a fine, hospitable lot; and appreciation of the happy days at Milo, Gumbardo and Boondoon are still with me . . . the gig shearers' strike was on . . .

Sidney Yeates always welcomed visitors, and an unusual one in the early 1890's was a young Royal Naval lieutenant, Ernest de Chair. The chances are that he met some of the family in Adelaide and that they suggested a trip to Boondoon, the customary route being by paddle-steamer up the Murray and Darling to Bourke, thence by coach to Adavale.²⁵ While Ernest de Chair was at Boondoon the younger Yeates girl, Mary, returned from a lengthy absence, and on the night she arrived at Boondoon there was a great welcome for her:

The bachelors all rallied from their quarters in the long room of the house, and she saw, on entering, a young Navy officer who was looking at her intently. Like a flash she knew why she had come back . . .²⁹

In fact, Mary Dymphna Yeates and Ernest de Chair were married in 1893. Years later, a brother of the groom, Admiral Sir Dudley de Chair, became Governor of New South Wales (from 1923 to 1930).

In a chronicle such as this, attention should be drawn to the pioneering spirit of Sidney Yeates' wife, Dymphna, who was at his side in the bush for so many years. She bore 12 children and reared them all to adulthood, sharing the isolation and loneliness in the Flinders Ranges, the trying tropical climate in North Queensland and the heat and drought of Boondoos's stony mulga ridges. Besides managing a large and busy household and making "splendid butter,"¹ she could also take charge of station affairs when need arose. At one time on Boondoos, Dymphna became critically ill from what proved to be a bowel obstruction. Walter Yeates rode at top speed to Adavale where there was then a medical man. Following Walter's entreaties he agreed to ride back to the station, where he operated on Dymphna, with Walter as anaesthetist.

Flora Yeates was a great help to her mother at Boondoos. One of her tasks was to supervise the big household clothes wash, for which she received assistance from willing Aboriginal women and girls. These Aboriginal women thought a great deal of Flora, and numerous girl picaninnies born on the station were named after her by their mothers.¹

There was an Aboriginal camp on Boondoos and some of the men worked as stockmen with Sidney, who always got on well with them. However, they were liable to disappear on a walkabout "without a minute's notice".¹ Arrangements of stones, including several circles on an extensive ceremonial site some distance from the head station, are still in place to-day; and underlying the area are said to be limestone caves with good water.

IMPRESS ON A YOUNG LIFE

It now remains to record the impressions which Boondoos left on a boy who grew up there in the 1880's-90's. Herbert Yeates was barely two years old when the family settled on the station and about 15 when they left. Thirty-five years later he described to the writer (his youngest son, then also about 15) the excitement he felt when the bullock teams arrived with the station's stores, often at intervals of six months. He recalled, too, how the snakes would come up around the house from the creek on summer nights, sometimes being found in the creepers growing along the verandah. From the time he was 11 he commenced undertaking significant jobs connected with the property, and as a teenager he did boundary riding which occasionally kept him out over-night. Although there were huts on parts of the run which afforded shelter, he recalled the loneliness. He championed the self-

reliance which bush life inculcated; yet he always strove to alleviate the hardships of others. He revered all that his pioneering parents stood for, and was never happier than when travelling in outback Australia. His stock and station business in Toowoomba kept him close to the land and, later, as a Country Party member of the Queensland Legislature, he worked hard to improve rural conditions – particularly the transport system. He represented East Toowoomba in Parliament from 1938 until he died in December 1945.

The Yeates family left Boondoon in March 1894 after 13 years of hard but generally successful endeavour. There had been a serious drought the previous year – so bad, in fact, that Milo station lost 160,000 sheep. Wild dogs were troublesome and the rabbit pest was becoming established in the district; but none of these problems on their own seems to have accounted for the Yeates' decision to leave. The only recorded statement is that Sidney "sold his interest [in Boondoon] just in time to avoid the worries of the great drought in the subsequent years."⁶

On retirement to Toowoomba, Sidney and Dymphna Yeates named their cottage "Mambray" in memory of their first home site on Mambray Creek, Baroota run, in South Australia. Sidney died in 1918, aged 86, 19 years after his wife. Their joint tombstone in Toowoomba cemetery bears the words:

How long we live, not years, but actions tell;
The man lives twice, who lives the first life well.

Boondoon to-day presents a very different scene from that of a hundred years ago. Nobody now lives on the property. It is run from Acton, far to the north, and a helicopter is used to muster cattle. Although a northern section has been cleared of gidyea scrub and sown to buffel grass, the loneliness of the stony ridges and the desolation of hut ruins and old stockyards strike a sad note – certainly for a Yeates. Instead of the bustle of a large family and their employees, plus the movement of Aborigines, Boondoon is now silent, still, eerie. Once-thriving Adavale, too, is practically deserted. The question then arises: did the pioneers mis-judge? This writer thinks not; but rather that their expectations were modest, relative to those of the following generations of graziers. Motor cars, private planes, entertainment, beach holidays, clubs, boarding schools – now taken for granted – demand greater affluence. In some districts, certainly round Adavale, this means larger holdings, far greater capital, increased mechanisation, less population and the demise of towns; but is it progress?

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