CHAPTER I

THE IMMIGRANT

by Lloyd Evans, the company historian

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ARRIVAL

Entering Port Phillip Heads in the Morning Light, on 2 November 1857, Samuel McWilliam and his fellow passengers received a chilly greeting from cold south-westerlies and showers as they crowded the rails for their first glimpse of the gateway to Victoria, the golden colony. A misty view of the Bellarine peninsular to the Went and the Mornington Peninsular to the East cleared to a fine view of the suburban dwellings of Brighton, St Kilda and Sandridge (Port Melbourne) as they approached the mouth of the Yarra and prepared to berth at the new wharves near Queen's Bridge, Melbourne.

A mere village in 1835, occupied by the advance guard of a pastoral invasion. Melbourne had grown rapidly by 1850 into a commercial metropolis during the pastoral occupation of the Port Phillip District which was precipitated in that year from a squatting district of Hew South Wales into the Colony of Victoria. The discovery of gold began, during the second half of 1851, a rush of immigrants, first from other colonies and then from overseas, which transformed Melbourne into a great gold town as the immigrants poured through her port, purchased their gold-seeking gear and headed for the diggings. By the time Samuel McWilliam arrived, in the spring of 1857, Victoria was well on the way to becoming the most wealthy and populous of the Australian colonies.

During the year of Samuel McWilliam's arrival, his fellow immigrants from overseas totalled 45,677, a number exceeded during the "golden age", 1851 - 1861, in only two other years, 1852 and 1853, at the beginning of the rush from overseas. Fourteen hundred of them arrived in four immigrant ships on the same day as Samuel.

The Morning Light, Jacob Gillies master, 2377 tons, was a Black Ball Line Clipping Packet out of Liverpool with almost her full complement of passenger and a cargo of general merchandise - earthenware, axles, bags of oats, firkins of butter, cases of confectionery and the like - consigned to Melbourne agents and announced to the less-than-eager, oversupplied public of the Metropolis in the daily press on 4 November. The voyage, via the Cape of Good Hope, had been crowded and uncomfortable. The only vessel "spoken", on 17 September, 41 days out of Liverpool, was the Royal Charter a steamer homeward bound from Melbourne. Mail and information about home and the colony were exchanged in Lat.24 31 South, Long.26 55 West, off the west coast of southern Africa; and it is not too fanciful to imagine the outward-bound emigrants wondering whether steam power might not offer them, in the future, a safer and more comfortable passage home after making their fortunes in the colony.

Samuel's fellow passengers were typical, in most respects, of the 572,661 immigrants who arrived in Victoria during the main period of the gold rush 1851-1861. The Morning Light carried 657 passengers, 160 cabin (34 of then children) and 488 steerage (64 of them children): most were, like Samuel, young, unmarried adult males from the United Kingdom; the majority were English although in steerage Ireland supplied 218, England 202 and Scotland 68. The majority, including Samuel, gave their occupation as labourer; however, typically, there was a high proportion of immigrants who described themselves as artisans, including watchmakers, shoemakers, carpenters and joiners, stonemasons and turners as well as butchers and miners. And, like Samuel McWilliam, the majority had paid their own passage to the colony.

It is not possible to say how many of the Morning Light's passengers were "mere fortune-hunters", Merivale's caustic description of those who departed the colony after making a quick fortune or disappointed in their expectations: or how many were stayers and therefore numbered, like Samuel, as a net gain to the colony. By 1861, 280,000 had departed leaving a net gain of 293,31: in a population which had grown from 77,345 in March 1851 to 541,800. Amongst the stayers were 122,331 females of the 168,221 who had arrived in the pe????; However, despite the higher retention rate of female immigrants, marriage opportunities for single males like Samuel McWilliam remained unequal in a population where males outnumbered females by three to two.

Noting the high quality of the immigrants who remained after the gold rush, the historian of the period has emphasised the number of skilled artisans and professional men in the high proportion of those immigrants had paid their own passage. Samuel McWilliam was an unassisted immigrant; however,

at first sight, he does not appear to have had the qualification: to be categorised with the men of outstanding quality who contributed so much to the development of the colony of Victoria during the second half the nineteenth century. Closer inspection of this Irish labourer's origin training and character reveal a person of first-rate colonizing quality with attributes essential for pioneering the outback during a period, the 1860's and early 1870's, when the majority of settlers failed or barely survived.

ORIGINS

Samuel McWilliam was born on l5 April 1830 at Raloo, near Larne, in the County of Antrim, Northern Ireland.

He was the second son in a family of six sons and one daughter - Crawford (1323-1915), Samuel (1830-1902), Thomas (1833-1914), John (1835-1918), William A. (1837-1372), Mathew (1840-1883) and Elizabeth Jane (1342-1830) born to Samuel (l800-l882) and Elizabeth (nee Crawford) (1801-1872) of Mounthill, Ballyrickardmore, County Antrim.

MountHill was a mixed farm of 120 acres which prospered by canny thrift, sound husbandry and the hard labour of growing sons. Writing to Samuel on 22 October 1871, his father made, light of his age and "rhymatic (sic) pains in my loins and knees I am very lame but thank Gad I might by worse"; described the state of farming at Mounthill and gave what news he had of the fortunes of members of the family who had, by tint time, left the farm to the present inhabitants - "Br. Mathew (a bachelor), mother and myself a servant man and servant girl .Servants wages vary high now ", he continued, "they get from eight to ten pounds a half year and bed and board girls got from four to five pounds this half year You will get no man to work for less than one shilling and four pence per day and board The potato crop all over Ireland is not good this season we have not more than one third of what we had this few years past the disease came on soon and cut them all down the one half in general(sic) is a part of them rotten and what is sound is quits soft and not fit for food. We had a pretty good corn crop this year and cut early in the season. It was all stalks about the 12th of September There has been a good crop of hay and well saved. We have got a little machine up to help in our work it both churns, and thrashes is worked with one horse and appears to do the work well. Cows if all sorts is selling high from £10 to £20. We have a neighbour sold four May calves in Bellymana fair for the sum of nineteen pounds. Horses I never knew so dear at present. You can get no horse fit for farm use for less than twenty pounds and from that to forty. Sheep are high in price. Pork and pigs of all sorts gutting down in price it sells from 38 shillings to 43s per cwt of 112 Ibs butter from one shilling to 14d per Ib.

Brother Thomas, with "three healthy children", was farming successfully in Northern Ireland; John was still unmarried but had already earned a reputation as " a steady good preacher arid well up in the rules of Methodism" and was stationed on the Ballyclare circuit; Elizabeth Jane, married to her cousin Thomas McRoberts by her brother John in the Larne Methodist Church, by 1871 had "three children all little girls fine healthy ones" at their farm near Glenarm - "a good farm "of sixty acres, "they can raise wheat or beans on it.

They paid £780 for it and £72.10 of rent yearly. If they keep in health and is fortunate, they may do pretty well on it." Brother William A McWilliam, Surgeon, who was sent to Glasgow for training in medicine, was practising in Belfast: "I believe there is no doctor in the town" his father wrote, proudly, "doing more business than he is doing at present."

A strong family bond was evident in an undated scrap written by William to his brother in Australia to thank him for his congratulations on "my entry into the fold of matrimony. Your kind brother's wishes come home to me none the less sweet and Acceptable" that they had arrived long after the event. With "Christmas coming to us in a few days", he continued, "just fancy you sitting down to your Xmas turkey or goose on a hot sultry day." Brother Thomas's wife had just presented him with a small specimen to which they have appended the name of Sam - so that you will be represented here now... John is still single. I have a greet notion to propose to somebody for him as I don't think he will perform that part for himself...there never was a less worldly soul."

Crawford emigrated to the United States of America in 1845, returning to Northern Ireland several years later to marry, before settling in Iowa. In 1371 his father reported to Samuel that despite illness and hardship experienced during the Civil War he now had a "good independent way of living" on his

holding of three to four hundred acres of land" which he worked with the assistance of "a large family - "a great help in working their farm." Crawford, who had moved from Iowa to Missouri during the 1850's, also revealed a strong family bond in a letter he wrote to Samuel from Schuyler County in March 1874, urging Samuel to follow his example in visiting the family in Ireland and to visit Missouri on route, giving detailed directions for a detour which would bring him to Crawford's farm whilst crossing the United States from West to East. He enquired about Samuel's family of "dear little Australians"; provided news of his own family whose names were virtually a roll call of his brothers and sister; and described conditions of farming in Missouri - "Pork at the present time is worth $4.50 per hundred pounds, corn worth 50 cents per bushel, oats 40 cents per do., wheat l.25 to 1.50. Butter has been 25 & 26 cents during the winter but at present I expect 20 cents per pound. Describing Crawford as "an old and prosperous farmer" who owned a large tract of improved lend and pays particular attention to raising and dealing in livestock", the History of Lewis, Clark,Knox and Scotland Counties, Missaouri,1887 declared that much of his success was due to the feet that he "had received a liberal education" before emigrating to the United States of America.

The McWilliam family, of County Antrim not only had a strong pioneering tradition, each generation since the early eighteenth century sending its quota of migrants to the colonies and the United States of America, but also had a keen interest and pride in its antecedents. Family pride was evident in the great Bible which not only recorded births and deaths in the family but which included a painting of the Armorial Bearing and Coat of Arms of the McWilliam family taken from the Scotch Herald (sic) by a relative, Samuel Whitford, at the request of Samuel McWilliam senior.1

According to one tradition the family traced its origin to the union of the younger son of the Earl of Ormonde, Sir William Butler, with Grace O'Mally, the Irish chieftainess who was reputed to hold extensive territories near Galway Bay, during the fifteenth century.

There are several other versions of the origin of the name McWilliam. One tradition, also of an Irish origin, states that in a period of continuous civil strife following the Norman Conquest of Ireland, when Norman magnates such as the Butlers were establishing their power in Ormonde and the Fitzgeralds in Munster, the de Burghs and their allies claimed Connaught and, subsequently, Ulster. During the fourteenth century, however, the great magnates had difficulty controlling their Irish possessions: a minor branch of the de Burg, sons of William 'Liath' (The Grey) who had gaelicised their name to Burke, rejected the feudal law of succession and divided the family land in Connaugh between them. The Burkes now adopted the family name of Me(son of)William, intermarried with Irish families and adopted the Gaelic language. Meanwhile the legitimate successor to the de Burgh inheritance in Connaught, Elizabeth de Burgh, married Lionel, son of Edward III, providing the Tudors with their claim to Irish territories during the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.

Another tradition, directly concerned with County Antrim, spells the name variously as McWilliam, McGuillim, McQuillen, McQUilliam, McCulliam and trace the family origin to de Mandeville, one of the knights in the retinue of de Courcy, who held lend in County Antrim in the 12th century. In this version, the son of Hugo de Mandeville, about 1310, adopted the style McHeughlin which, in d course, was spelt variously as McGuilliam, McWilliam and so forth. The family claimed to be Princes of Oalriada until defeated and dispersed by the McDonnells of Scotland in 1580. The confusion about the family name is evident in a Tudor tradition which classified a McGuillim style with an Irish family English descent; and a contrary tradition, recorded in the Ulster Journal of Archaeology in 1860, traces the origin of the family to the Irish source, Niall of the Nine Hostages, from which the styles McQuillen, McWilliam and so on derived. This was the family expelled by the McDonnels following the battle of Aura in 1580, spreading the family name in various styles.

The name McWilliam itself was not invariable. Some families adopted the style McWilliams, Others adopted the style MacWilliam, which is the correct pronunciation, rendered typographically as M'William until quite recently: in fact that style was adopted by two of Samuel's brothers - the Reverend John W.A. MacWilliam and Crawford MacWilliam of Missouri.

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[1] Unfortunately for the tradition, the Office of the Lord Lyon, Edinburgh, has no trace of Whitford's version of the McWilliam Armorial Bearing nor of his source. However the Lord Lyon provided two other Armorial Bearings: one blazon is dated 1427; the other Armorial was compiled by Sir John Balfour who was Lordlyon from 1630-1654. Copies of these Coats of Arms have been kindly provided from the description, by Graeme R. Jebb,Esq., Executive Secretary of the Heraldry Society, Australian Branch.

Whatever their more distant origins, the McWilliam family of County Antrim, from whom Samuel descended, were able to construct a genealogy of their immediate ancestry in the vicinity of Lame, beginning with Alexander McWilliam, a blacksmith, who emigrated from Wigtonshire with his wife, Jane Millar, about 1700 and established a smithy when Larne was a mere village. According to a local tradition, the site of the smithy is still visible. One of the sons of Alexander and Jane married Mary Gordon of Mounthill farm. According to the Larne version of the family's history, Mary was the granddaughter of the Scottish rebel, John Gordon, who owned Mounthill and John Gordon was said to be the son of Viscount Kenmurs whose family paid a heavy price for their rebelliousness2. According to this version the family's Scottish descent was beyond question and Samuel was a direct descendant of Alexander McWilliam of Wigtonshire and John Gordon.

Samuel's mother, Elizabeth Crawford, was said to be a descendant of the Crawfords of Ayrshire, Stuart loyalists who claimed kinship with the royal house through Nancy Blair, wife of Patrick Crawford, who was said to be the granddaughter of Bruce Blair, laird of Ayeth in Stirlingshire, a descendant of Mary, second daughter of Robert III. The McWilliams and the Crawfords, and their cousins the McRoberts frequently intermarried and shared a common interest in their family traditions, an interest maintained by their descendants today.

The liberal education which Samuel senr and Elizabeth of Mounthill provided for their children included an important element of family history and tradition. Such traditions were part of the invisible baggage Which Samuel junior and his brother Crawford carried with them when they emigrated. Of at least equal significance in that baggage were: appreciation of the deep concern of the family in Northern Ireland for their well-being and success in the new lands to which they carried their family's honour and traditions; a thorough grounding in the techniques of mixed farming including a keen interest in experiment and innovation; strong protestant (Presbyterian) religious convictions combined with devotion to the doctrine that achievement was the product of hard labour, thrift, honest and fair dealing, common sense and family effort.

MELBOURNE

From the circumstances of the colony of Victoria and the facts known about Samuel Mc William in the period between his arrival in the colony in 1857 and* hie marriage in Geelong in January 1863, it is possible to speculate about his experiences as a young immigrant seeking what his father called a "good independent way of living."

The facts are few and may be summarised in a paragraph. First, his father acknowledged receipt of a letter from Samuel dated 9 September 1858, replying on 5 December that he "was glad to know of your being in good health" and asking his son to "write when this reaches you and give us a full account of the manner of making life in that country they (the family) think your letters too short" and informing him that "I sent off a cheque for fifty pounds ten shillings on the Bank of New South Wales, Melbourne, dated London 4th October...directed...to you to the care of Mr Roger Whiteford"; enclosing as well an authorisation for Samuel to receive from Mr James McCarry the ten pounds which he borrowed from me on the 23rd Sept. 1853 with whatever interest he thinks fit to give by paying my son Samuel. I will receive it the same as payment to myself." Second, he married Martha Steele, spinster, aged 21 years in Geelong on 6 January I863, according to the ceremonies of the Wesleyan Church, giving as his condition, Bachelor; rank or profession, Farmer; and usual place of residence, East Gippsland. Nothing else is known about him in this period but a great deal is known about the colony at this time and it is possible to fill in some of the background in which he prepared to establish a family.

Melbourne in 1857 must have impressed the young immigrant from Ballyrickardmore , County Antrim. No longer a frontier town of the period of pastoral occupation and early gold rushes, Melbourne now accommodated more than four times the population of 1851, most of its inhabitants located in the surrounding suburbs of Fitzroy, Collingwood, Richmond, Sandridge (Port Melbourne) ,Hotham (North Melbourne), Emerald Hill (South Melbourne), St Kilda, Flemington, Essendon, Carlton, Hawthorn and further out, Brighton. All suburbs were surveyed and in the process of being subdivided, and provided with municipal governments under the Act of 185? and were the scene of vigorous building

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[2] Unfortunately for this version of the Kenmure connection, The Scots Peerage has a full account of the Kenmures which does not include; an Irish branch established by John Gordon at that time.

activity - majestic town halls, mechanics institutes, churches, schools and court houses and private homes. Private companies were planning and developing railways which linked Melbourne with Geelong in 1857 and, following the opening of the railway to Sandridge in 1854, connected the metropolis with many of the suburbs by 1861.

Comparing the city of 1857 with the "wretched discomforts" of Melbourne during the early years of the gold rush, "streets knee deep in dust or mud -choked up with horse or Bullock trains or ,merchandise and people jostling and elbowing through the crowd", the produce merchant and immigrant, Wilson Hardy, wrote to his sister in England during March 1857 that the streets were now "orderly (metalled), flagged watered and gaslighted. Oh any fine evening you could fancy yourself in London or any large English city -we can now get good accommodation for man or beast - I rather fancy some of our hotels or places of amusement would astonish some of our Londoners and Parisians — and many of our snug little cottages with pretty gardens would quite cut you out."

Samuel must have noticed that Melbourne residents, as others observed, were inclined to "blow" about their marvellous city: but then they had something to blow about. Reflecting the wealth of the golden age and the sensibility and intellect of the remarkable young men attracted to the colony, Melbourne had established a University in 1854 and constructed some remarkable public and commercial buildings - the Public Library, Parliament House and the New Treasury, the Mint, Customs House, Victoria Barracks, the Melbourne Club and Bank of Victoria in Collins Street, great blue-stone Warehouses, the "Melbourne Grammar School-and Wesley Church not to mention the comfortable terrace houses, built by the rising class of young merchants and gracious town houses, like Como, of the squatters who, contrary to some gloomy predictions, had shared the prosperity of the gold discoveries.

He must also have approved the development of public gardens no less than the "air of serenity and quiet decorousness which pervaded the capital on the sabbath morning" and the summon to worship of church bells ringing throughout the city and suburbs - although, as another visitor observed, only a minority appeared to be church-goers and most citizens preferred to take their families-into the public gardens or to the surrounding countryside on their day of rest.

Collins Street, described by one visitor as "to Melbourne what Regent Street is to London" must have impressed gawking immigrants with its fashionable shops, "beautiful ladies gliding out from one shop into another...Beaux, too of the most elegant description, who may be seen from two to four o'clock marching up and down...and occasionally standing,.(to) contemplate the fair promenaders." Bourke Street was more raffish with its raucous market at the Eastern end and theatres, dance halls, grog shops and book-sellers. The theatres were popular and the star attraction ,on the day Samuel arrived in Melbourne, was the famous Shakespearean actor, G.V.Brooke, then advertised as the leading actor in a performance of “Lord Byron's Sardanapal or the Fall of Nineveh".

The pious Samuel McWilliam was undoubtedly one migrant who accepted the good advice offered by the various emigrant guides published in the United Kingdom and in the colony, and avoided the grog shops and ill-lit back allies where desperate men preyed on new chums and celebrating diggers. Crime was rife in Melbourne despite the recruitment of London Bobbies and the reorganisation of the police force under the Police Act of 1853 and despite the deterrence of the hulks moored off Williamstown and the forbidding blue-stone penitentiary, Pentridge. He must also have been impervious to that other hazard for young male immigrants, the charms of the prostitutes who, according to the Argus leading article on the day of his arrival, were "abandoned women, brutalised by their excesses, who subsist upon the profits of their degradation" and "fill our streets with ribaldry and blasphemy."

Immigrants who succumbed to the city's temptations or its scoundrels could seek assistance at the Immigrants' Homes or from the Benevolent Societies which were supported by public and private funds. But these organisations were also concerned with other kinds of distress for they were also responsible for assistance to the unemployed, a function which greatly exceeded their resources at the time of Samuel's arrival and as he hopefully sought to establish "an independent way of living."

Contrary to their expectations, based largely on information available in the United Kingdom prior to departure, immigrants arriving in 1857 found the colony sliding into a recession from which it did not recover until the middle 1860's. Falling gold production, from the peak reached in 1855, over-speculation, a glut of imports and the sharp rise in overseas immigrants during 1857 were the

principal causes of the recession. Unemployment was widespread, especially in Melbourne, and was aggravated during the year by the completion of major works such as the railway to Geelong and the Tan Yean water supply. Despite relief works, including road construction and new suburban railway schemes, the supply of labour greatly exceeded the demand.

In the long run, emigration from Victoria to other colonies and overseas and a marked reduction in the intake of immigrants helped to restore balance to the labour supply and the process of economic recovery. Meanwhile the immigrant who, like Samuel McWilliam, wished to remain and fulfil an ambition for an independent way of life, required a little capital, thrift, a capacity for hard work, perseverance, an eye for the main chance, a marketable skill and, perhaps, a little luck.

It is not known whether Samuel tried his luck on the gold diggings. It is known that he brought a little capital with him, capital which was augmented during 1858 by a remittance from his father; that he was thrifty and industrious; and that his training in husbandry was a valuable asset in the circumstances of the colony.

His attention and interest must have bean attracted to those pockets of comparative prosperity in the colony in the districts adjoining the older goldfields and to the fact that, when new gold fields were discovered and settled, the most successful occupants were those who provided food and other services for diggers pursuing the will-of-the-wisp lucky strike and for the increasing number of miners employed by mining companies. During the 1850's the Victorian government brought forward land for purchase by auction after survey, with the result that the number of farms and market gardens increased dramatically from about 3,000 in 1854 to more than 13,000 in 1861. In the period 1854 - 1860, Victoria's acreage under crop, principally wheat, oats, hay and potatoes, increased at the rate of 30,000 a year to over 419,000; and their was a constant demand for dairy produce, meat and horses.

Purchase of land at auction was difficult for men without considerable capital; hence tenancy was the common form of farming occupation. By the time of his marriage in January 1863 Samuel McWilliam declared his occupation as "farmer" of Sale; and in the absence of evidence of a purchase in that district, it is not unlikely that he was a tenant farmer leasing from a pastoralist - unless, of course, he was simply making a statement of his intention to become a selector under the terms of the Duffy Land Act.

MARRIAGE

Considerably more is known about Samuel McWilliam as a landholder in the Parish of Denison, County of Rosedale, near Sale ,after his marriage to Martha Steele in January 1863, than there is known of his activities in the period 1857 to the end of 1862. Before investigating the circumstances which attracted him to Gippsland and which enabled him to achieve an independent way of life, it is profitable to consider how he acquired a Geelong bride.

Occupied in June 1835 by a party representing the Port Phillip Association of Van Diemen's Land, on land "purchased" by John Batman from the Dutigallar tribe, Geelong and its surrounding district became the springboard for the pastoral occupation of the Western District of Victoria. Hence Geelong, on Corio Bay, not only claimed historical priority over Melbourne but also economic priority - the Pivot, a term coined by the Geelong Adveriser, of the colony - and sought to establish the town's right to become the administrative centre of the Port Phillip District.

Despite the handicap of an extensive sand-bar off Point Henry which limited Geelong’s commercial development, the district expanded rapidly during the late 1830’s and 1840’s as the gateway of the rich, wool-growing Western District; as an important producer of wheat, oats, dairy produce and wine-growing; and as a centre of manufacturing, especially salt-making, flour—milling, tanning, soap, candles and building products. By 1951, when Victoria was supplying about 90 per cent of its Own breadstuff requirements the farmers of the Geelong district were making a significant contribution not only to the food supplies of the colony, but also to the idea promoted by the press in Geelong and Melbourne and by Philosophical and Horticultural societies in the colony that yeoman, mixed farming would inevitably replace squatting (large scale pastoral occupation) as the predominant form of land use.

British newspapers, supported by a variety of emigrants guides, joined the optimistic chorus, contributing to the renewed interest in assisted emigration which re-commenced in 1848. In the Geelong district, expressions of optimism included invitations to men of skill to engage in farming, in the confident expectation that cultivation would be extended in the near future to Portland from the Geelong base.

In 1857 the Geelong district was still an important centre of mixed farming and had profited considerably in the first years of the gold rush by its proximity and ease of access to Ballarat. Thus it is not unlikely that Samuel McWilliam would have taken advantage of the opening of the railway linking Melbourne to Geelong in that year to visit the district and appraise its opportunities. Also, having selected Gippsland as his centre of enterprise, perhaps by 1862, it is possible that he visited Geelong by the most convenient means of transport - the steamer from Port Albert - for the purpose of purchasing suitable stock, farming equipment and the like.

On the other hand, he must also have learned in 1857 that the farmers of Geelong were becoming the least prosperous in the colony because of the flood of cheap cereals imported from other colonies by sea; and that a Bellarine Farmers' Association formed in 1856 was demanding corn laws, spearheading the movement for protection of the colony's industries.

There was another reason for Samuel's visit to Geelong and district soon after his arrival in the colony, a visit which probably led to a meeting with Martha Steel. Already there was a small colony of farmers from Lame and County Antrim settled in the Port Arlington district on the Bellarine Peninsular - correspondence from Larne to a resident of Port Arlington during the 186O's referred to the marriage of Samuel's sister Eliza Jane to her cousin Thomas McRoberts - and members of Martha's family were established as farmers at nearby Point Henry. It is not too fanciful to speculate that Samuel visited former friends and acquaintances from Larne at Port Arlington, discussed with them farming prospects in the colony and was introduced to his future wife at a social function or church service.

Martha Steele was born in Geelong in 1841. Her mother was a Pulsford of Tiverton, Devonshire, where she married William Saunders, a wheelwright and bore him a son, also William, before their emigration to Van Diemen's Land about 1828. At the time of Martha Steele's marriage to Samuel McWilliam, her half-brother, William Saunders, who signed the wedding certificate as a witness was a prominent farmer at Point Henry.

Little is known of Samuel's father-in-law, whose name was" written on the wedding certificate, Edwin Steele, occupation, farmer. He was the second husband of Martha Saunders and, according to his daughter's obituary in the Corowa Free Press, many years later, he was "one of the earliest settlers in that neighborhood (Geelong) and a pioneer in the Ironbark Forest District which lies between Geelong and Cape Otway." Although the surname was spelt "Steele" on the wedding certificate and on the birth certificates of Martha's children, Samuel spelt it "Steel" on Martha's death certificate; significantly he also spelt his father-in-law's name "Edmund", not "Edwin". Edmund was also the Christian name of one of Martha's children.

Confusion over the addition of a letter "e" to the name Steel is not difficult to understand at a time when there was apt to be inaccuracy in official records when names were given by word of mouth to clerks and others responsible for notarising documents. There was another inaccuracy, Samuel's age, on their wedding certificate indicating inaccurate transcription by the person drawing up the document. However the change from Edmund to Edwin is intriguing.

Thers are several references to a pioneer of the Geelong district, named Steel or Steele, in R.V.Billis and S. Kenyon, Pastoral Pioneers of Port Phillip. One refers to "Saunders and M. Steel", Grant County, " Steel's horse station, Darraweitgum, 1840 onwards with Saunders", identifying him as "Michael Steel"; a second reference places Saunders and Steel in "the Ironbark Forest or Ranges ...near Jan Juc" (close to present day Bell's Beach); and a third reference places an Edmond Steele at Point Henry, Indented Head, 1841-7. Billis and Kenyon noted that the spelling of persons' names was erratic.

It is also possible that he was briefly the holder of the famous Coryule pastoral station who sold his interest to a Mr Austin,on 1 April 1843, for €360, probably lacking the capital to stock it effectively. Austin sold Coryule to the lady squatters, Anne Drysdale and Carolina Newcomb on 12 April ; and on

Friday 14 April, Miss Drysdale's diary noted: "P.M. Steel came & we engaged him to remain 12 months."

It appears that he came from Van Diemen's Land with the other settlers of the district. If so, his farming background might indicate that he was the Edmund Steel(e), ploughman and malster of Three Legged Cross, Hants, who was convicted of machine breaking during the "last labourers' revolt" in Southern England, transported for life (carrying the gaol report - "good conduct and connexions"! in the Eliza, on 29 May 1831, to Van Diemen's Land and granted a free pardon on 24 April 1837.

Samuel McWilliam and Martha were married in the Yarra Street Methodist Church, Geelong, on Tuesday 6 January 1863, by the well known preacher, Reverend Joseph Dare, during a heat-wave. On the previous evening the Reverend Dare conducted the inaugural meeting of the Newtown Young Men's mutual improvement society after which "the cup that cheers but not inebriates" was enjoyed with other refreshments. On the day of the wedding, bush fires were reported at Hamilton; several thousand people viewed the remains of Messrs Burke and Wills; prayers were offered in the churches of the city for the blessing of rain; and, news of special interest for the newly-weds, the Geelong Advertiser reported on further developments in the search for gold in the colony.

GIPPSLAND

Gold discoveries provided the key to unlock Gippsland for the settlement of immigrants who, like Samuel McWilliam, sought an independent way of life as farmers.

Gippsland was defined by Government proclamation in September 1843 as that district bounded "on the south and east by the sea; on the north by a line running in a westerly direction from Cape Howe to the source of the nearest tributary of the Murray River and the Australian Alps; again on the west by the Alps, and a line south to Andersen's Inlet" - and, in the estimate of Charles James Tyers , the first Commissioner for Crown Lands in the district, the region was "about. 250 miles in length, and 56 miles average breadth, and containing, consequently, about 14,000 square miles; of which the ranges comprise perhaps about 10,000 square miles; forest, scrub, and generally available land, 3,000 square miles; and the good available land, 1,000 square miles."

Access to Gippsland from Melbourne was so difficult that when Tyers attempted to proceed overland to take up his appointment, the Port Phillip Patriot reported on 28 December 1843 that he had been "foiled in attempting to reach Gippsland... the whole party underwent considerable hardships during the journey and several horses were knocked up and left," Tyers was obliged to follow the sea route to Gippsland, arriving with his retinue of native and border police at Port Albert on 13 January 1844.

At that time there were two routes into Gippsland. The first, opened up by the most competent of explorers, Angus McMillan, who, as overseer in the service of the imperious New South Wales squatter, Lachlan Macalister, penetrated the forest south of Omeo and, in a series of expeditions between May 1839 and 14 February 1841, discovered "low country extending as far as the eye could carry ... and such noble streams emptying themselves into it (which) put me in mind of the 'land of brown heath and shaggy wood, land of mountains and the flood', that I gave it the appropriate name of Caledonia Australis ... Here was a country, capable of supporting all my starving countrymen, lying dormant, land of kangaroos and laughing jackasses." McMillan discovery of a suitable outlet to the sea fulfilled his employer's ambitions for access to the markets of Van Diemen's Land and New Zealand for stock depastured in the new region. However Macalister's attempt to keep the discovery secret, until he was well established in the district, failed. His friend James Macarthur sponsored and took part in an expedition, organized by the flamboyant Polish adventurer, Count Paul Strzelecki, which followed the tracks, already cut by McMillan, as far as the Macalister river, diverged west, missing Corner Inlet, and almost perished attempting to penetrate the morasses and timber barring a direct western route to Melbourne.

Saved by settlers at Westernport from starvation and disaster, the party arrived in Melbourne in May 1840 with news of a lush land, ripe for settlement which Strzelecki named Gippsland, accepting credit for its discovery -but also confirming the difficulties of direct access from the west.

Strzelecki's description of "delightful country, covered with grass and large supplied with permanent streams, every five or six miles apart" aroused great interest in Melbourne. Interest was heightened

by the news, published on 19 January 1841, of the exploration of Comer Inlet by the Singapore, the relief ship sent from Melbourne to the rescue of the 700 ton steamer, the Clonmel, wrecked on an island on the south east boundary of Corner Inlet. The announcement that the Singapore had found a fine harbour, actually McMillan1s outlet to the sea, led to the formation of a syndicate which organised an expedition , chartering the Singapore, which by early March had established a settlement at Port Albert, described by Brodribb, a leading shareholder, as " a fine harbour" adjacent to "fertile land and idyllic beauty.

Port Albert, focus of the second route, by sea, into Gippsland remained the principal modeof access from Port Phillip Bay for settlers and stores until 1865 when a coach road was constructed, with great difficulty, linking Melbourne with Sale along the mail track which had been opened up during the late 1850's.

Although many Victorian colonists, like Samuel McWilliam, were anxious to settle and farm the land so highly praised by McMillan and Strzelecki, they were frustrated by the difficulty of access which made the carriage of necessities and produce costly, by the prior occupation of the land by squatters, mostly from New South Wales, who were predominantly cattle graziers in Gippsland by the l850's, and by the lack of adequate markets in the region itself. Despite some expansion following the discovery of gold at Omeo in 1854 which encouraged the growth of such inland towns as Sale and, especially, Bairnsdale, the total population of Gippsland in 1861 was little more than 6000 and growing very slowly.

Access to Melbourne markets was not adequate for Gippsland producers until the Melbourne to Sale railway was completed in 1879, four years after Samuel sold up and left Gippsland with his family. The other two problems were overcome dramatically during the period 1859-1863 with the discovery of gold in the ranges dividing Gippsland from the Murray river and following the enactment of Land Acts which attempted to provide opportunities for small farming on the former pastoral runs.

There can be no doubt that Samuel's decision to farm in Gippsland was the result of the rush of diggers to the new gold fields: Jamieson and Gaffney' Creek on the Upper Goulburn and Mount Baw Baw (1859-1860); Wood's Point(l86? followed by the rush to the Jordan, Donnelly's Creek and Fulton's Creek by 1862; and, in the month he married Martha, discoveries at and the rush to Stringer's Creek, the beginning of Walhalla.

At first it appeared that the diggings would be supplied from Melbourne, at first via Jamieson and later by a track which the Victorian Government decided to clear from Healesville in the Upper Yarra Valley, by-passing Jamieson, leading to the pack route which linked Wood's Point with the Jordan Valley. And, as late December 1862, surveys were made to facilitate a direct Melbourne link with the diggings by the northern route.

By May 1862, Gippsland interests were pressing the Victorian Government to develop a southern route to the diggings. Rebuffed, they offered a reward of £50 for the discovery of a route from Sale to the Jordan. Two trails were soon blazed; one by Tom McEvoy and “Portugee” Joe, the second by A.S. Campbell, by way of Heyfield, Bald Hills, Mount Useful and the Aberfeldy which, like Stringer's Creek, was a tributary of the Thomson river. Bald Hills developed as a staging point for unpacking wagons and loading pack-horses for the mountain trail and as a centre for the registration of claims.of access from Port Phillip Bay for settlers and stores until 1865 when a coach road was constructed, with great difficulty, linking Melbourne with Sale along the mail track which had been opened up during the late 1850's.

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The tracks encouraged the discovery of new gold-fields at the head water of the Thomson, including Stringer's Creek; and the store-keepers, stage-coach operators and settlers of Gippsland found their accessible markets even before the Roads and Bridges Department followed up McEvoy's and Campbell's tracks with an official survey at the end of July 1862. (Note: illustrations here from Gippsland Guardian and Gippsland Times).

Rosedale grew as a focal point for communication with the diggings and as the centre of a district which supplied the diggers with many of their needs. In 1871 the Postal Directory described Rosedale as " a postal town...situated on the Latrobe river 116 1/2 miles South-East from Melbourne and at the junction of the roads between Port Albert, Stringer's Creek, Donnelly’s creek and Russell creek diggings. The district is an agricultural and pastoral one, with quartz and alluvial workings within 30 miles on the Thomson river..." At first diggers and goods arriving by steamer by Port Albert proceeded by coach or wagon via Rosedale and Heyfield; and from 1865 diggers could take a Cobb & Co. coach direct from Melbourne on the roughest road in Victoria, a 20 hour journey through thick forests and swamps, changing coach at Rosedale or, like this English novelist, Anthony Trollope, picking up horses and supplies for the thirty mile journey to Walhalla, 55 to Russell's creek or 140 miles to Donnelly's creek.

Published in Sale, the Gippsland Times was a powerful advocate for the opening of the Southern route to the diggings and for the claim of Gippsland settlers to supply the gold-field population “with the production of our district, a claim which, from the intimate knowledge of the peculiar formation of the country, and the course of the main chain of the dividing range, appeared so palpable to us that we unhesitatingly took on ourselves the responsibility of claiming these fields as our own, and North Gippsland the district from which their cereal supplies must be derived.”

The supply of cereals and other products of the land was the subject of a Gippsland Times editorial on 19 September 1862. "The first step in the advancement of any new country is from pastoral pursuits to agricultural. For this assertion we have got the precedent of every known civilised nation which has existed from the beginning of the world to the present date, and towards this state of progression North Gippsland has made a great stride during the last few days when over fifty thousand acres have been purchased and leased under the new Land Act."

Wednesday 10 September was the “first day of selecting agricultural allotments under the new Land Acts...” the Gippsland Times reported on 12 September. “On that day the reproachful term Terra Australia Incognita was for ever buried in oblivion; the starless night of desolation had passed, and monopoly and oppression were hurled from their throne...(Hitherto)...Gippsland was divided into two classes --the occupier of vast tracts of land, and the labourer who tended his flocks and herds...Times have, however, changed...; a middle class — that class which, though only possessed

of moderate means , have large and comprehensive minds -that class which in Britain equalizes the balance of power and places her institutions on such a permanent basis of which the whole history of the world gives no precedence. That class generally known as the middle or intermediate was largely added to our population on that day..."

It was not long before the Gippsland Times changed its tune. Far from settling a large and moderately prosperous yeoman class, the new Land Act produced a struggle between selectors and the "privileged tenants of the Cr??, the pastoralists, whose superior wealth, combined with loopholes in the legislation, enabled them to retain possession of a considerable proportion of the land offered for selection, although at great cost. Hence the struggle to unlock the land from the squatters' grasp, a struggle which took off in 1857, the year of Samuel McWilliam's arrival in, the colony, continued in another form after the Land Acts passed and were applied to the various districts of Victoria.

Gippsland was not available for selection under the terms of the first Land Act (1860). The revised Land Act (18 June 1862) which its author, Charles Gavan Duffy, predicted would enable "any person who wished to settle upon the land" to do so with no more difficulty "than in getting a loaf of bread from a well-stored baker's shop" was applied in Gippsland, coinciding with the gold discoveries and the development of an accessible market. One hundred and twenty seven agricultural areas were declared in the colony during September and October 1862; the land was surveyed before selection; selector paid a uniform price of £1 per acre from 40 up to a maximum of 640 acres; half of the purchase amount had to be paid immediately, the remainder could be paid at 2s 6d per acre per annum over a maximum of 8 years; the selector could apply to the district land office for his selection, occupying it immediately unless one or more other persons applied for the same selection in which case ownership was settled by lot. If a minimum of ten selectors took up at least a quarter of an area declared for selection in a district, they could share grazing rights (commonage) to the remainder until it was selected.

On 26 September 1862 the Gippsland Guardian (Port Albert and Rosedale) warned that 'speculative land jobbers", able to mobilise capital and "dummy selectors" would have an advantage over bona fide selectors; but that residents of the districts at least had the advantage of knowing the quality of the land offered for selection. Samuel McWilliam's knowledge of the district apparently stood him in good stead when land was offered for selection in the sections of the Parish of Denison, known as King's Plain, already surveyed by Hugh Fraser in January 1862.

Designated "good agricultural land" in Eraser's survey, Samuel's first selection was made on 26 July 1863 on alluvial soil near the south bank of the Thomson river, a little over 20 miles from Stringer's Creek and on the wagon tracks to the diggings. He paid £78 for subdivision A of allotments 2A and 3A, Section 13, Parish of Denison, consisting of 77 acres 2 roods and 7 perches. Paying instalments of 2s 6d per acre, he completed his purchase of the adjoining subdivision B of allotments 2A and 3A on 5 December 1868. Meanwhile he added to this area of about 145 acres allotments 3P (5 acres) and 3D (27 acres) in 1867, extending his selections of about 177 acres virtually to the south bank of the Thomson river.

The eastern boundary of his property was the present Rosedale-Nambrok road; and the property was intersected by the Sale-Heyfield road. The distance to Rosedale was about 7 1/2 miles (12 kilometres); to Sale 12 miles (19 kilometres); and to Heyfield 7 miles (11 kilometres).

Samuel McWilliam's affairs had prospered sufficiently by 1865 for him to share in the purchase of another property about two miles east, towards Sale, along the Sale-Heyfield road. The allotment (1A, Section 12, Parish of Denison) of 100 acres 2 roods stretched north almost to the Thomson river and was bounded on the east by the Rosedale-Maffra road. McWilliam and his partner, William Ross, paid the sum of £553 .7s.6d for the land on 11 January 1865. On 13 August 1867 they paid £12.5s.8d for allotment 1D, consisting of 12 acres 1 rod and 5 perches, extending their property to the south bank of the Thomson.

An immigrant from Ireland, William Ross described himself as a farmer of King's Plain and as a friend of the parents when, as informant, he registered the birth of William , first born of Samuel and Martha McWilliam/ several months after the event which took place at the homestead on 31 October 1863. Ross had taken up a selection of almost 70 acres, south of the Sale—Heyfield Road (Allotment 2B, Section 13) and adjoining the southern portion of Samuel McWilliam's first selection. When the partnership ended in 1869, Samuel sold his share of the property on the Rosedale-Maffra road to

Ross and purchased his former partner's 70 acre allotment. Thus he consolidated his property at the junction of the Sale-Heyfield and Rosedale-Nambrok roads into a total of almost 215 acres, slightly above the average size of selections in the district.

By 1869 Samuel was one of the successful selectors of the region, of the king ? described by the Gippsland Times as "that class generally known as middle or intermediate", sharing with his neighbours in the pioneering tasks of clearing the land, converting pasture into arable land, constructing a homestead and outbuildings and experimenting with a variety of forms of land use - cereals, potatoes, fodder, and animal husbandry including pigs, sheep and dairy cattle; and supplying the needs of the gold-fields and the burgeoning towns of Rosedale, Heyfield and Sale. A photograph taken at the time by Trood of Sale reveals a man in his prime, handsome, bewhiskered and assured, dressed in sober corduroys with watch tassle at the fob. He was already the father of four children: William; Eliza Jane(l3 February 1865); Crawford (14 September 1866); John James (17 June 1868) - names reflecting the close ties with his family in County Antrim, although it is likely that his first-born also expressed Martha's closeness to her brother, William Saunders.

1869 was also the year in which Samuel held his first public office, as an elected member of the Rosedale Road Board, forerunner of the Rosedale Shire Council.

The Road District of Rosedale was proclaimed in February 1869 and William H.Foster was appointed to conduct the election of 6 members of the Board. The editor of the Gippsland Times hoped, on 13 April, that the electors would "put the right men in the right place and that a Board may be established the will work harmoniously for the general good, undisturbed by party prejudices or cliqueism; so that those for whom they will legislate may derive advantage from the changes that will take place in controlling a large and influential district. Within the Rosedale Board District there is both wealth and intelligence. The two combined may do much to improve its present condition by adopting those judicious courses which may float it into a haven of prosperity."

Reports of election meetings held in the township of Rosedale expressed the anxieties of residents of the town and those south of the Latrobe river, where the town was situated, that their interests would be submerged by other interests. The election results confirmed their worst fears: on 8 May it was reported that although the day had passed quietly - the only untoward incident being a severe injury suffered by an elector whose horse stumbled and threw him, on the way to the poll - the electors had returned pastoralists and farmers and the townspeople were unrepresented. At the declaration of the poll James Smith (127 votes), Donald McLeod (126) ,pastoralists, led John Wilson (126) and Samuel McWilliam(l23) and Edward Sproule (117)farmers, with the pastoralist W.E.King (117) filling sixthplace whilst the five candidates put up by the townspeople, including the well-known store-keeper Henry Luke and publican George Steadman, trailed the field.

"Cliqueism" was inevitable given the conflict of interest on such issues as the principle of raising rates on town, agricultural and pastoral land and priorities for road and bridge construction in the district. Thus on the evening that the poll was declared Samuel McWilliam and Sproule were approached by Smith, the most successful candidate, whilst at dinner in the Dixon's Bridge Inn, with a proposition that they should all proceed to the Rosedale Hotel to discuss the time and place of the first meeting. They agreed and discovered that the meeting wished to discuss the appointment of a chairman and, Smith declining the honour, agreed to support McLeod. The farmers on the Board had "second thoughts and, at the first official meeting, McWilliam, seconded by Wilson, nominated Sproule. The vote divided evenly for Sproule and McLeod and the chair went to McLeod by lot leaving Sproule to lament that the farming interest would be jeopardised by the chairman's casting vote.

Meetings of the Road Board were fully reported by the Gippsland Times during Samuel's period of office from May 1869 to July 1870, providing the only direct evidence of his expression of opinion in Gippsland. He proved to be an assiduous representative, attending all meetings of the Board and demonstrating a keen interest in all matters affecting the district and the interest he represented. He had strong opinions on rating assessments; on the appointment and emoluments of officials of the Road Board; on the declaration of main roads by the Road Board Department; on the costs and efficiency of road repairs, a major problem after the floods of May 1869 and May 1870; on bridge building which included his representation of Rosedale in discussions with the Avon Shire Council on the construction of a bridge on the Thomson; on the collection of statistics by the collector appointed by the Registrar General; and on many other matters in which he expressed caution and concern about the careful and efficient use of rate-payers' money and insisted on honest and fair dealing with

employees and contractors. His carefulness was evident when he successfully opposed, at the meeting of June 1870, a request from the Sale Benevolent Society for a donation towards its charitable activities: although defending the cause of charity, McWilliam and Sproule established the principle that rate-payers' money could not be used for causes outside the district.

Members of the Board retired in rotation. Samuel offered himself for re-election in August 1870 but was narrowly defeated for one of the two vacant positions by Henry Luke, store-keeper, coroner and, later, owner of the Gippsland Mercury.

On 16 June 1868, the day before the birth of John James McWilliam, the Gippsland Guardian, announced, on behalf of the Rosedale Mechanics Institute Committee, that the course of lectures postponed from 3 June would be held on 2 July and that it was expected that readings and recitations would be rendered by a number of local identities including the pastoralists, Messrs King and McLeod, and the pound keeper, Mr C. Du Ve, and that Mr Dunne would preside at the harmonium.

There is no evidence that Samuel McWilliam participated in these characteristic, self-improvement activities and entertainments, or in such other local events as Races and Sports held from time to time at Sale and Rosedale, or in the excitements of the Wurruck Wurruck Hunt Club, reported by its indefatigable correspondent, Faugh A Ballagh, which took off in the season from the Hunt Club. Hotel chasing kangaroos over farmers' fences, or in other social events such as concerts, plays, civic receptions and balls which marked the social development of country towns during the 1860's and the 1870's.

It is likely that Samuel took a keen interest in the attempts of the Victorian Department of Agriculture to improve the standard of rural production and in the proposals; reported in the press, to sponsor alternative forms of land use such as fruit and vines, tobacco and sugar beet and to establish butter factories in the region. And he must have been interested in the various proposals to improve the communication of Gippsland with a wider market via the Gippsland Lakes and by construction of a railway linking Gippsland towns and districts with the metropolis; and in the organization of an Agricultural, Pastoral and Horticultural Society which held its first show in Sale in March 1870.

There is, of course, considerable evidence of his interest in such local affairs as roads and bridges in the minutes of the Rosedale Road Board; but there is also evidence of his participation in community matters in Denison affecting the development of his young family.

Three more children were born, Thomas (4 March 1870), Edmund (3 December 187] and Albert who died in infancy. Samuel's concern for the spiritual needs of his young family was evident in his efforts, as a trustee, for the construction of a Presbyterian Church on the public reserve which was located on the Sale-Heyfield road, on the south-west corner of the property he purchased with Ross in 1865. Another trustee, George Gibson, conducted a private school at Toongabbie during the 1860's and it is possible that the older children attended that school or, more likely, the school conducted in her home, for her own children and those of her neighbour, by Mrs Buntine, wife of a farmer next-door to the McWIlliams. By the early 1870's, the Denison Presbyterian Church Hall was used as a rural school under the care of the dashing Edwin Weaver; on 1 December 1873, Samuel McWilliam and George Gibson, with the other trustees, leased the Church Hall to the Department of Education established by the Education Act of 1872 and it is likely that the older McWilliam children were foundation members of Denison State School, which celebrated its centenary in 1874.

During June 1875, C. Mackintosh and Company announced in the Gippsland Mercury and the Gippsland Times that they had "received instructions from Samuel McWilliam, Esq., of Denison, who has sold his land and is leaving Gippsland, to sell by auction on the ground" his stock, equipment and furnishings. On 1 July the press gave notice that the sale would take place that day at 11 A.M. and that the following items would be offered for sale: "50 head mixed well-bred cattle, consisting of - 9 Milch Cows, Springing Heifers, Steers, &c., 1 well-bred Bull, 1 first-class brood Mare in foal, 3 geldings, good farm horses. 1 Hack, 150 pure bred Lincoln Ewes (stud flock), 20 large fat Wethers, Fat Pigs, 50 Bags Oats Stack, Wheaten Hay Farming Implements, consisting of Horse Dray and frame, nearly new, double wheeled Plough, two sets Iron Harrows, two Reaping Machines, one nearly new, Potatoe Scarifier, Chaff Cutter, and horse work complete &C ., Churn, Milk Dishes, and all the Household Furniture, also Harness of every description."

Several weeks after the auction, “on the 14th day of July at 11.42 o'clock in the forenoon”, Samuel officially transferred the titles of his properties to the busy Gippsland entrepreneur -farmer, grazier, cattle-dealer, flour miller and public works contractor - John Carpenter, and prepared to leave Gippsland.

The surveyor's map of the Parish of Denison (1862) described Samuel's selection as "good agricultural land"; and, indeed, Charles Gavan Duffy, author of the Land Act of 1862, had described the region as ideal for cereal production and mixed farming. Confidence in the agricultural resources of region was also expressed in editorial opinion in the Melbourne press as early as the 1840’s, and in the Gippsland press at the time the land was thrown open to selection

The idea that Gippsland was an agricultural El Dorado died hard. During the 1870’s, despite the number of farmers selling up and moving out, the Gippsland press continued to praise the inherent qualities of the district for all forms of farming whilst lamenting the inadequacies of the Land Acts, the inefficiencies of individual farmers, the lack of cheap communication by rail or sea to the metropolis, such natural disasters as floods, drought, caterpillar plagues and rust in wheat which was encouraged by periodic flooding, and inadequate drainage. The press noted, with approval, the formationof the North Gippsland Agricultural, Pastoral and Horticultural Society and its work for the improvement of farming practice from early 1870; the work of the region's Road Boards and Shires on the roads and bridges of their districts; the improvement of access by sea via the Lakes; the turning of the first sod of the Morwell-Sale portion of the railway to Melbourne in 1875 and its completion by 1879; and "the good example set by individual farmers in 'such innovations as the use of steam-threshing and crop experiments.

However Samuel McWilliam's decision to sell up and leave Gippsland must have been based on a cool appraisal of the future farming prospects of the region. He was not one of the poor selectors who failed through lack of capital and expertise and the choice of poor land. He was a comparatively successful, knowledgeable farmer who read the signs of the times sold at & good price, acquiring the capital to venture elsewhere and taking with him some hard-earned lessons on the difficulties of farming the Australian outback.

By 1875 he had discovered that the return for mixed farming in Gippsland, despite great effort, was inadequate for the investment required to maintain productivity. The diminishing-population of the goldfields and their declining prosperity undermined his principal market; on the other hand, the opening of the railways would inevitably bring severe competition, especially for the holder of a medium sized farm, from cereal farmers in other districts, an experience already encountered by his wife's family in the Geelong district. Meanwhile cereal yields were falling; and, without refrigeration, it was not possible to rely for "an independent way of living" on dairy farming, today the principal form of land use of farmers in the district, including the present owners of Samuel's selection.

There were other problems including the vulnerability of his land to flooding and the outbreak of typhoid fever in the district in 1875. However the most important additional reason for moving out was a family problem common to Gippsland farmers at the time: "what shall we do with our sons?"

By early 1875, Samuel and Martha had a family of six sons and one daughter, their ages ranging from 11 to 3 years. Sons were valuable to a pioneer farmer, where paid labour was scarce and expensive, both as free labour and as a source of income from their casual labour. Samuel's sons had been too young to provide much assistance in his pioneering period in Gippsland; now the pioneering phase was over unless more land could be acquired and the farm extended. By 1875, however, as the Gippsland Times reported in the month the McWilliams left Gippsland, the eyes had been picked out of the farming land of the district "leaving but the mountain and scrubby land to men of bone and sinew", hence a substantial outlay of capital would have been necessary to provide growing sons with the opportunity for an independent way of life in the district. Meanwhile, optimistic forecasts in the press of the effects of completion of the railway link with Melbourne had increased land values. It was a good time to sell provided there were opportunities for the family elsewhere.

During the 1870's it appeared to many Victorians that the Riverina region of New South Wales was such a land of opportunity.

End of Chapter I

CHAPTER II

COROWA IN THE RIVERINA

TO THE RIVERINA

At the time when Samuel McWilliam sold up and moved to the Riverina, mobility was a characteristic of Australia's outback population. Not only the mobility of seasonal workers such as shearers, splitters, well-diggers and other contract workers and of the dispossessed and needy humping their swags, but also the mobility of restless men with capital acquired in one region seeking to venture with their experience into other regions which appeared to offer greater opportunities ,especially for growing families.

The McWilliam family were, therefore, typical of a mobile class of outback settlers. Many of the fathers were, like Samuel, gold rush immigrants with sons to provide with an independent way of life. The Gippsland press published many advertisements advising the sale of property of this class of men, selling up their farming equipment, stock, stores, and homestead furnishings with their land before leaving the district. In a number of cases the advertisers stated that they were selling up in order to settle in "the Riverina districts of New South Wales".

Samuel's restlessness was evident in letters from his brothers William and Crawford. An undated letter from William, the Belfast surgeon, who died in 1871 leaving Samuel a bequest of £250, continued a previous interchange about investment prospects in South America; and a letter from Crawford dated 20 March 1874 referred to Samuel's plans to visit "home", where his father was ailing and lonely following the death of his wife, and enquired whether Martha would accompany Samuel or remain in Australia to care for the farm and the family of little Australians.

There is no evidence that Samuel visited his family in Northern Ireland. The memories of Samuel and Martha's children, passed on to the grandchildren, state that the family moved first to the Wahg unyah/Rutherglen district in north-eastern Victoria, near the Murray, and that the decision was taken, eventually, to settle in Corowa where Samuel became a vigneron, planting cuttings smuggled across the Murray by boat.

There is no reference to Samuel McWilliam in Victorian or New South Wales Postal or Country Directories until the Sands Directory of 1881-1882 listed him as a "farmer of Coreen, Corowa", a mysterious address in view of the distance of the Coreen station from the Parish of Corowa and the absence of evidence of any Selection or tenancy by Samuel on Coreen. It is not impossible that Samuel was, briefly a tenant in the north-east of Victoria or, for that matter, across the Murray in the southern Riverina before purchasing land in the Parish of Corowa in 1877. The gap between the sale of the Gippsland property in 1875 and settlement in Corowa is a mystery requiring more documentary evidence to test speculation and supplement family memory.

Unknown to Samuel, Martha and their young family, the decision to move from the well-watered, lush pastures along the Thomson River to a comparatively dry region, was to have important consequences for the family's fortunes -for the kinds of cultivation and expertise they were able to develop, for the opportunities available to them and for the direction of their activities. With hindsight it is also possible to say that the decision was to have, in the long run, important consequences for the development of a significant portion of the Riverina as well as for the Australian wine industry.

On 5 August 1877, a second daughter, Isabelle, the seventh surviving child, was born to Martha and Samuel McWilliam in Corowa. Three days later, Samuel purchased from Robert Bromfield, grazier, of Dubbo and formerly of Scotland, a property of approximately 480 acres, consisting of portions 5,6,7,18,19, and 20 in the Parish of Corowa, "in consideration of the sum of One Thousand Five Hundred and Sixty Pound of lawful British money paid by the said Purchaser to the said Vendor" - a property, however, "Subject to an Indenture of Lease" for five years from 11 May 1875 , made between the previous owner, Thomas Bromfield and William Fox Martin, publican, of Corowa.

On the available evidence, Samuel McWilliam was already well known in the district as a competent farmer, equipped with stock of good quality and efficient farming machinery replacing the stock and equipment sold in Gippsland. The Corowa Pastoral Agricultural and Horticultural (P.A.& H.) Society,

established in December 1876 to foster improved methods of husbandry in the Parish, held its first shows in February and August 1878. On 5 January 1878, Samuel was appointed one of three expert farmers to judge the Poultry, Dairy Produce and Garden Produce Sections of the show, positions he held for a considerable period. At the February show he won first prize for the best double furrow plough exhibited in the Class; in April, at a meeting with other elected committee members of the P.A.& H. , he was appointed to a select committee of three to draw up the program, "collect the moneys and make all arrangements for a ploughing match. And in the second show held by the Society in August he won second prize in Section 10 Cattle Durham Class 4, for the "Best Cow with Calf at foot."

This evidence suggests that Samuel could have been an occupier of land in the district, perhaps as a tenant farmer, prior to purchasing land from Bromfield. It also suggests that family memory is correct in believing that he occupied the land purchased from Bromfield, at least in part, in 1877, an event requiring an arrangement with William Fox Martin, formerly a grazier and butcher, who became licensee of the Royal Hotel in 1876.

At all events it is clear that, by 1877-1878, Samuel McWilliam was one of a considerable number of Victorians attracted to the Riverina, many of them in response to pamphlets circulated in the colony by the New South Wales Government urging persons with capital and farming experience to take advantage of the opportunities for closer settlement in the region. And his six children and wife contributed to the high proportion of Victorian-born in the population of the Riverina: by 1882, however, Samuel and Martha had contributed three more children (Isabelle,1877; Rose May,1880; and Mary,1882) to the number born in New South Wales in the rapidly expanding region.

THE RIVERINA

The appeal of the Riverina for Victorians was not visual; unlike the attractiveness of Gippsland to Samuel and Martha in the early 1860's. On the contrary, the first explorer of the region, Captain Sturt, describing its "plains of great extent" during his Journey down the Murrumbidgee, in December 1829, declared that “nothing-could exceed the barrenness of these plains, or the cheerlessness of the landscape"! and the English novelist, Anthony Trollope, visiting the Riverina in 1872, wrote that it was a "wide, open ugly pastoral district...The plains not lovely to look at..." and lacking the more picturesque "rocks and gullies and widely spreading forest trees" which had enchanted him in other districts of Australia.

By the time of Trollope's visit, the unpicturesque Riverina was, in his opinion, "of all strictly pastoral districts of the world ... perhaps the best At no time defined as an administrative unit, the Riverina was a geographical region, a land of great rivers and their tributaries, which owed its development since the first, tentative occupation by squatters and their flock and herds during the 1830's, to its saltbush covered plains and reedy water-courses which were naturally adapted to pastoral enterprise. Definition of its limits has baffled contemporaries, officials and historians who, agreeing that the western limits might be fixed at the junction of the Murrumbidgee and the Murray, and the southern limit on ,the Murray, have been less certain about the northern limits, when Riverinans themselves sometimes included the Lachlan or about the eastern limits which were frequently placed vaguely in the vicinity of an imaginary line from Albury to Wagga Wagga.

The rapid development and great wealth accumulated in the Riverina during the 1850's was based squarely on the Victorian market during the gold-rushes when the population of the colony multiplied almost by five, outstripping the food-, especially the meat-producing resources of its pastoralists and farmers. At first Riverina herds and flocks supplied the meat-consumption needs of diggings and urban centres (Bendigo, with a population of 41,000 by 1861, was only 50 miles south of the Murray; and Beechworth, with a population of 23,000 by 1861, and the Ovens fields were within 30 Miles of Albury). But, in the long run, the demands of the Victorian market could not be met by Riverina pastoralists who also became dealers in stock driven south from the Darling Downs, New England and the Liverpool Plains, as well as from grazing lands at the head waters of the Lachlan and the Murrumbidgee,(west by way of the Lachlan in the wet season and east by the Murrumbidgee in dryer periods) to the holding areas. There they were fattened and held, to maintain the market, before being funnelled through Deniliquin, Moama and Echuca.

Cattle (at 6 to the acre, on average, compared with 1 sheep) predominated in the land use of the region until the early 1860's when the Victorian meat market declined and pleura-pneumonia

decimated herds. Rising wool prices swung the pendulum to sheep during the 1860's and by 1891 the total sheep population of the Riverina increased from 1 million to over 13 million.

Grazing land, in the “unsettled" districts-of the Riverina, was held on 14 year leases under the terms of the Imperial Land Act of 1846 and the Order in Council of 1847 which were applied in the region in 1852 and were, therefore, not due for revision until 1866. Meanwhile squatters were able to purchase any part of their runs at a minimum price of £l per acre with the result that choice river frontages were purchased extensively by the time the leaseholds expired.

English visitors, like Anthony Trollope, accustomed to & green well-watered countryside, naturally questioned the prospects of closer settlement in the Riverina. In Trollope's opinion "nearly the whole of this country is unfit for agriculture. Though the soil in many parts of it is rich, the climate will not allow the soil to produce wheat. The average rainfall is not above fourteen inches in the year - and the summer heat is very intense." And even where, "in the south-east around Albury and Wagga Wagga...wheat is grown...the rainfall greater and the heat less intense...it seems to be a question whether cereals can be produced with sufficient consistency to repay the farmer."

Pastoralists, supported generally by the Riverina press, strenuously rejected the demands of land-hungry men in the 1860's and 1870's for the land to be unlocked from the squatters' grasp and thrown open to selection and closer settlement by a yeoman class of agriculturalists and small graziers. Thus by the early 1860's the agricultural potential of the Riverina was a subject of fierce debate.

On the one hand, it was argued that the stimulus of neighbouring gold-field populations during the 1850's had revealed considerable possibilities for the cultivation of cereals, fruit and vegetables and production of dairy produce. Squatters' cultivation paddocks, not only on runs such as Robert Brown's Collendina, close to Corowa, on the Murray, and close to the Ovens fields, which had 150 acres in cereals, vines and fruit in 1861, but also on runs much further to the west in the hottest and driest country, were fenced and produced a variety of crops -wheat, maize, oats, vegetables, various fruits including grapes- as well as running fowls and dairy herds. Like the inn-keepers along the stock-routes, whose cultivation paddocks supplied the needs of outback travellers, squatters used supplementary watering from their river frontages which were often dammed, and from wells and tanks constructed by outback contractors.

The principal farming activities in the period occurred in the vicinity of towns established, in this first phase of urbanisation in the Riverina, at crossing places, along the rivers, discovered by explorers and overlanders and by squatters driving their flocks into the region: Hay, Narrandera and Wagga along the Murrumbidgee; Moulamein, Wangahella and Jerilderie straddling the Billabong; Deniliquin on the Edward; and Moama, Corowa and Albury ,with their Victorian counterparts, along the Murray.

Beginning as mere villages, providing services to crossing stock and their drovers and to local pastoralists, towns grew slowly until the gold-rushes provided new demands and opportunities. Only two towns were worthy of inclusion in the census of 1851 : Albury on the Sydney-Melbourne coaching road (a four-day run by Royal Mail) with 442 persons and Wagga Wagga with 170. By 1861 Albury had 1587 in the Municipality which included the agricultural hinterland (proclaimed in 1859) and 981 in the town; Wagga Wagga,627; Deniliquin,632; and, down the scale, Hay had 172 inhabitants; Moama,144; and Narrandera and Corowa about 100 each. In the developing towns, punts preceded bridges as grog shanties preceded hotels and meeting-houses preceded churches. Police detachments, established first to protect settlers against aborigines defending their interests, brought law and order to districts infested with bush-rangers and with sheep- and cattle-duffers. Land agents and surveyors, based on Albury, regulated the occupation of town sites and neighbouring agricultural reserves as well as squatters' boundaries and pre-emptive right purchases. As the town and country population grew, the demand for a variety of services and needs were met by stores and specialised shops, shoe-makers and hatters, tailors, black-smiths, foundries, saw-pits, brick-kilns, flour-mills, breweries, postal services, hospitals and other medical services, cemeteries, churches, newspapers, schools, showgrounds, and racecourses — facilities varying with the wealth, size and energy of the community.

When town sites were planned, surveyors were required to report on the extent of cultivable land in the neighbourhood and to reserve, suitable land for sale. The process continued as towns grew, so that, by the late 1860's, there were not only well established agricultural settlements in the

neighbourhood of all towns, but also a considerable area of cultivable land surveyed and available for purchase.

The six 80 acre portions in the Parish of Corowa, purchased by Samuel McWilliam in 1877, were originally sold, as lots proclaimed on 7 September 1857, after survey, to Strother Ancrura Meyer on 16 March 1858. In this transaction, the 80 acre portion which became the Sunnyside Vineyard (portion 20) was sold as lot 7. Meyer was a large-scale capitalist farmer of the district, noted for his sound methods of husbandry. His employees tended his dairy herd, pigs, vegetables and vines; cleared his land of stumps; built fences and outbuilding; sank wells; ploughed and planted his paddocks; and harvested and winnowed his cereal crops using the latest machinery which was also hired out to neighbours; and transported his wheat, oats, maize, hay, grapes, wine and vegetables, eggs and milk and drove his cattle and pigs to market. Some of Meyer's extensive holdings in the Corowa-Albury district were leased to tenants and he also dealt in land.

Capitalist farmers like Meyer were graziers as tell as cultivators, as were most of the small farmers of the region who, with average holdings of less than 100 acres, invariably kept livestock, both for work and produce, on their uncleared land. If they were tenants, like Samuel McWilliam's lessee, Martin, they also guaranteed to "keep down all thistles and Bathurst burrs now growing or hereafter... not to interfere with any timber now growing"...and to "keep fences and buildings in good repair." Of the small farmers, the highest standards were set by a party of German farmers who settled in the vicinity of Corowa and Albury in 1851. Rhinalanders and Catholics, most of them brought to New South Wales in 1848 to work as vine-dressers, the party of 200 included some skilled artisans (hatter, blacksmith, cabinet- and shoe-maker) who settled in Albury; but most were landholders setting an example of thrift, industry and farming expertise. During the 1860's another large party of Germans, mostly Lutherans, and from South Australia and Victoria, settled in the Albury district and also offered examples of farming skill and industry.

By 1861, about 8,000 acres of Riverina land was under cultivation of which 7,000 acres were in the Wagga and Albury Police Districts. About half produced wheat, just under half produced oats and the remaining 500 acres were under more intensive forms of cultivation such as vegetables, orchards and vineyards. The evidence of successful farming in the area under cultivation was cited, during the late 1850's, by the movement fighting the cause of closer settlement and opportunity on the land: as the verse published in the Albury Banner, 12 December 1860, declaimed -

"Unlock! Unlock! throw open wide, the portals of your land,
Let all enjoy those blessings given by an all bounteous hand,
Let all your voices clamorous rend Australia's sunny sky —
Selection, Free Selection let it ever be your cry.

Then shall the wilderness rejoice and blossom as the rose -
Then shall Australia's wilds bring forth each herb and fruit that grows,
Then shall the sturdy sons of toil, each with a moistened brow,
The treasures of the earth unfold and cry 'God speed the plough!"

On the other hand, the squatters defended their interests as the pioneers of the region, emphasizing the increasing value of wool to the wealth of the community and the known qualities of the region for depasturing sheep and cattle, and questioning the motives of supporters of the movement to settle men with little capital or knowledge of farming in the Riverina. Their opposition to closer settlement, vigorously supported by the Riverina press, was given force by the slump in agriculture in the region which coincided with the passing of John Robertson's Occupation and Alienation Acts in 1861 and which was still evident when the Robertson Land Acts were applied in the region in 1866.

The principal argument of the opponents of closer settlement was that soil and climate in the region were perennial obstacles to cultivation. These alleged natural obstacles were compounded by squatters themselves occupying some of the most favourable locations along the river frontages either by pre-emptive purchase or, under the terms of the Occupation Act (1861), by having extensive frontages declared as special reserves. Under existing farming techniques, it was said, Corowa was the natural western limit of cereal farming which was considered to be a risky enterprise even in the south-eastern Riverina when hot winds, in adverse years, shrivelled grain before the harvest.

The contraction of the markets which had encouraged the expansion of agriculture; together with the costs of transporting produce to more distant markets were formidable problems contributing to a slump in agriculture during the 1860's. As long as demand and prices were high on the Ovens Valley markets, the difficulties and expense of carting heavy and perishable products were more than adequately compensated; but the decline of the gold-fields population, together with competition from produce carried cheaply by South Australian riverboats to Moama/Echuca and Corowa/Wahgunyah, resulted in a fall in prices and began a slump which was not adequately compensated by the gold discoveries at Rutherglen in 1859, Wahgunyah, Kiandra and Lambing Flats in I860 and Corowa in 1861. Victorian farmers were now competing keenly for north-eastern Victorian markets and the new fields in New South Wales were difficult of access, except for Corowa where the rush was short-lived.

When the Land Acts came into operation in the Riverina early in 1866, the anticipated rush of selectors was moderated, therefore, not only by squatters successfully using their wealth and influence at the land office to resist the invasion of their runs but also by other formidable difficulties.

By the middle 1870's, however, the tide was turning in favour of the land-hungry men, a high proportion of them from Victoria. Thus the Gippsland Times reported in May 1875, the month in which Samuel McWilliam negotiated the sale of his property, a querulous extract from the Corowa Free Press complaining that Victorians were "pushing their way gradually but surely into the Riverina - like a plague of locusts", some of them "with sufficient capital to take up 4 or 5.-selections" under the terms of the Land Acts.

The movement of Victorians into the Riverina and the increase in land sales were indicators of changes and improvements in the conditions of farming, which took place over an extensive period and which had already made the region more attractive and challenging at the time when the McWilliam family settled on the outskirts of Corowa. Thus, although the escalation of land sales and settlement took place in an atmosphere of conflict between squatters and bona-fide selectors, with fraud, blackmail and litigation almost commonplace, and in circumstances which enabled the squatters to convert a considerable proportion of pastoral leaseholds into freehold at a great price, the Land Acts succeeded in settling in the region a numerous body of selectors as farmers, many of them with quite extensive holdings on which they combined cultivation with grazing. By 1891 the population of the Riverina had increased from less than 10,000 in 1861 to about 60,000 of whom over 60% were rural dwellers; and the expansion of agriculture is evident in the increase of acreage in grain during the period from less than 8,000 to over 200,000.

Victorians, including Samuel, made a useful contribution to improvements in farming techniques. Undoubtedly the most important development, however, was the discovery and application of dry farming techniques, not only on the forested lands with their underlying red-brown soils, such as the great ridge extending from the Murray and Coreen Creek to the Billabong, but even on the ”one-tree" plains of clay, as far west as Deniliquin, the 10" rainfall limit Dry farming techniques included both improved ploughing, planting and harvesting technology and the development of faster-maturing grains which enabled cereal producers to take full advantage of the regular April to October rain, harvesting before the onset of the hottest period of the year, as well of the dry summer conditions in which the lack of summer rain and humidity was a natural protection against the rust which so adversely affected cereal production in Gippsland.

Equally important for farming expansion by the middle 1870's was the development of transport facilities and the opening up of distant markets, especially the metropolitan markets of Melbourne and Sydney and overseas markets. Oriented towards the Victorian market, Riverina farmers and pastoralists were assisted by the completion of the railway from Echuca to Melbourne in 1864, followed by the extension of the line, on a broad gauge, from Moama to Deniliquin in 1876 with an iron bridge linking the railheads, and by completion of the line from Wodonga to Melbourne in 1873. These railway extensions were followed by completion of the Rutherglen-Melbourne line in 1879, later extended to Wahgunyah, each facilitating Melbourne's policy of tapping the trade of the Riverina, a policy which eventually turned off the river-boat trade down the Murray to South Australia. However, tariffs, introduced to protect Victorian rural industries, impelled Riverinans to look increasingly to the Sydney market. Favourable freight and handling charges encouraged Riverina producers to send their goods in bond, via Moama/Echuca, Corowa/Wahgunyah or Albury/Wodonga, to Melbourne for sea transit to Sydney. By the late 1870's the New South Wales Railway Commissioners were beginning to attract the Riverina trade by extending railheads into the region - by 1879 the southern line reached Wagga Wagga and, by 1881, Albury - and offering producers

differential rates. However tariffs and the rate of expansion of railways and freight rates were to provide scope for agitation and public pressure on colonial governments until the turn of the century. Meanwhile new towns and agricultural settlements, stimulated by cheap transport, developed along the railway lines.

The arrival of the McWilliam family in the Murray Valley coincided with an upsurge of farming expansion in the Riverina and with a rush of selectors on the land offices, including the land office established at Corowa to cope with the demand in Hume County. The extent of the rush during the 1870's is evident in the rate of selection: whereas less than 40,000 acres were selected by conditional purchase in the Counties of Hume, Denison and Howlong by 1869, more than 335,000 acres were selected by conditional purchase at the Corowa Land Office alone by 1879.

If it had been Samuel McWilliam's intention to become a selector, again, in New South Wales, he must have been disappointed by the amendment made in 1875 to the conditional purchase terms , eliminating the possibility of making a selection on behalf of each member of his family. He must also have been deterred by the inefficiency of land survey methods which made identification of selections imprecise and subject to challenge; by the extensive reserves of choice lands on squatting runs; by other devices employed by squatters and by dishonest pseudo-selectors to impede bona-fide selection; and by the difficulty of access of most of the land available for selection and the long period of expensive pioneering involved in taking up a selection.

By training and expertise he was versed in mixed farming, with a strong intensive component, and was particularly sensitive to the handicap of distant markets. He was fortunate1 in having sufficient capital to purchase a substantial farm, on which previous owners and tenants had made considerable improvements and which was close to a burgeoning urban market and to northern Victorian markets traditionally supplied by farmers of the south Riverina. This property, on the outskirts of Corowa, had other advantages derived from its own location in the Parish and from the location of the town itself.

COROWA

At the time when Samuel purchased Bromfield's 480 acre farm, with its fences, dwelling and outbuildings, and became active in the affairs of the town, Corowa was already outgrowing its original function, shared with Wahgunyah, as a crossing place for stock, diggers and produce en route to the diggings and as a port for up- and down- stream traffic.

Long used as a crossing place by the aboriginal inhabitants of the region, and occupied by white settlers since 1842, Corowa became virtually a satellite of its Victorian sister-town, Wahgunyah, for the first two decades after town reserves were gazetted in 1852. So much so that, although surveys of cultivable land were made during the late 1850's, including the land purchased by S.A. Meyer and ,subsequently, by Samuel McWilliam, and a town plan gazetted in 1859, the original town site became known as South Corowa and the town centre developed to the north-east at a settlement known as North Wahgunyah. North Wahgunyah developed at the point where John Foord's punt operated, conveying travellers across the Murray and grain for his flour-mill on the opposite bank.

North Wahgunyah (Corowa) was developed by the enterprise of the remarkable Victorian Foord, squatter, wheat-farmer, vigneron, merchant, flour-miller and land speculator and the equally remarkable Riverinan, John M. Sanger, squatter, farmer and vigneron and land speculator, who purchased land on the west and east sides respectively of the present main street of Corowa, Sanger St, which led down to the punt, and sold them as town lots shop- and hotel-keepers and other citizens. Wahgunyah itself also began as a "private" township on land, owned by Foord, which he had previously leased as a squatting run. In 1863 Foord formed a company with other entrepreneurs of Wahgunyah and Corowa to build a toll bridge, under charter linking Wahgunyah and North Wahgunyah(Corowa).

Although fulfilling an important function as a crossing place - for example the German settlers of the 1850's preferred the downhill haul to Corowa with their produce-laden wagons to the shorter haul to Albury - Corowa grew slowly during its satellite phase. By 1861, with a population of about 100, the Parish of Corowa supported two hotels and several saw-pits and a Court of Petty Sessions was held in the town, marking the flurry of activity which followed the discovery of gold on the Redlands quartz rise, several kilometres to the north of the town, bringing over one thousand diggers into the district for several months. Annual, regattas and swimming matches were established during this phase;

and the arrival and departure river-boats during the season contributed sporadically to the activity of town.

By the 1870's Corowa was beginning to experience boom conditions, the direct result of the town's role as a land office and the rush of selectors to the district, of the expansion of farming in the Riverina including the vicinity of Corowa and of the fact that, unlike Urana which also had a land office, Corowa had the advantage of being sited on one of the major permanent rivers with a water supply capable of supporting a substantial urban population. In fact Corowa's population grew steadily throughout the 1870's and 1880's whereas other towns, including major centres such as Albury and Wagga , levelled out during the 1880's as the selection movement went in a north-westerly direction, with many selling up and moving out.

The Australian Handbook of 1878 described Corowa as "a money-order, postal and telegraph township in the County and electoral district of Hume, prettily situated on the banks of the River Murray, 406 miles South west of Sydney and 34 miles from Albury. It is in the midst of a good and very flat grazing country, which is also well adapted for the vigneron's purpose. The hotels are Martin's Royal, Thomson's Riverine, Hicks' Globe, Commercial and others. There are a Mechanics Institute with 750 volumes, an Episcopal Church, a branch of the New South Wales Bank, Building Society, Custom House an agency of the Australian Widows' Fund Corporation, two schools, custom's office and a court house. The communication with the metropolis is by coach to Bowning thence the southern line; or it can be reached by way of Melbourne being only one mile north of Wahgunyah, Population, inclusive of the district, is estimated about 800. Newspaper, the Corowa Free Press. Steamers ply on the Murray to Echuca and other places during the winter season. Corowa is described as a fast growing, busy little township with a lovely climate, a very pretty situation and an increasing population.

It is only possible to guess at the response of Martha and the children to their movement from Gippsland to Corowa. Only one comment on their new circumstances survives from the memory of the oldest son, William, who at thirteen years of age, bore the brunt of the early labour on the new farm and contrasted the hard, red soil of Corowa with the alluvial soil of Gippsland. The contrast reflected the difference between living in a lush well-watered and cooler region on the banks of a river where they were subject to flooding and living at Corowa, in a sun-baked region with a low though regular rainfall, still close to a great river but well above its banks and out of reach of its highest flood levels and alluvial deposits. Rivers were to play an increasingly significant rote in the McWilliam story; but the move to Corowa represented a dramatic switch to hot and low rainfall areas of production.

A flair for assessing communications as a cost factor has been another vitally important element in the McWilliam story. Again, in Corowa, Samuel had selected a location central to the main routes to and from the district. The south east comer of the farm, which became known in the town as McWilliams Corner, was at the North West junction of the present Redlands Road and Whitehead Street. At the time of the McWilliam occupation Redlands Road was known as Jerilderie Road (and, later, as Sandy Ridge Road) , a euphemism for a wagon and dray track leading west to Jerilderie and to the Redlands quartz rise, scene of the gold rush of 1861. East-bound wagons, drays and other conveyances from Jerilderie and Redlands passed McWilliams Comer and turned south east along the present Bow Street for about two hundred metres to its intersection with the tracks which became the Main Trunk Road leading south by west to Deniliquin and nor by east to Albury or north to Culcairn. Sanger Street was formed at the south east of the intersection, leading some of the traffic from the outlying districts down to the river and the crossing to Wahgunyah. Thus the McWilliam property had both country and town orientations.

Past the farm, on the way to Corowa near the end of their journey, came wagons and drays laden in season with wool, wheat, hay and chaff, timber, hides and skins, tobacco, dairy produce, poultry, grapes and other fruit, eggs and other produce of the region bound for the Corowa market and, mostly for despatch to more distant markets by riverboat or by rail via Wahgunyah, and returning west with supplies for outlying farms and stations.

Also, past the farm, there came travellers by buggy, on horseback or on foot visiting the town from the outback or making a detour through the town to other destinations, travellers who included the nomad tribe of shearers, splitters, railway workers, gold-seekers, including many Chinese, en-route to new diggings or revived old diggings, and swagmen or, perhaps, selectors pulling out to seek new

opportunities outback - many of them bringing stories, heard perhaps on the bush telegraph, of fortunes and misfortunes, of high living and hardship and of outback crime, including accounts of the Kelly gang who ranged through north eastern Victoria and the southern Riverina during the late 1870's and bailed up the town of Jerilderie for a week-end in February 1879.

The sons of Martha and Samuel obtained their first experience of work away from the farm by following the nomad tribe to shearing sheds, railway construction sites and farms, when their labour could be spared at home, in the process accumulating a little capital, increasing their expertise and developing a determination to have an independent way of life.

The showground with its pavilion, show ring and other facilities was sited down Jerilderie Road, within walking distance from McWilliams Corner, and was the annual show place for the products of the district. There were sections for all varieties of farm and garden produce, livestock, wine , flowers, preserved fruits and pickles as well as for farming implements and conveyances - wagons, drays, buggies and for harness work, saddles and bridles - with prizes donated by notable residents of Corowa. As well as officiating for a number of years as a judge in the Garden Produce, Poultry and Dairy Produce sections and competing in other sections - in 1881 he won equal first prize in the section for the best single furrow plough against stiff competition offered by the implement manufacturer, Hendersons, who had moved their factory from Melbourne to Corowa - Samuel was active on the committee of the P.A.& H., Vice President in 1888 and, when debentures were issued in October 1886 at a special meeting of the society, he was elected one of the trustees in whom the show grounds and their buildings was vested.

Samuel was also active for many years in the administration of the town common established under the Commons Act to provide grazing and other facilities, especially for contributors in the district but also for travelling stock who were a constant source of annoyance to the fee-paying commoners. Illegal usage was not uncommon but difficult to prevent, much less Obtain redress, as Samuel discovered on one occasion when, as Secretary, he attempted to prosecute only to find, on arriving with the Common's solicitor in court, that the offender had skipped town with his flock ,avoiding service of a summons.

In 1879 quartz-crushing and other machinery and supplies passed McWilliams Corner proceeding west to the Redlands rise. The expense of this venture was not justified by the yield; however speculators sought the elusive deep lead from time to time, encouraged by reports of mining experts on the likelihood that the Rutherglen lead passed under the present course of the Murray to emerge north of Corowa, within walking distance of the McWilliam homestead. It is not unlikely that the McWilliam children fossicked in the old diggings despite warning about uncovered shafts; and when interest revived during the 1890's with the formation of the Corowa Deep Lead Company, under the chairmanship of J.C.Leslie, editor of the Free Press, McWilliams Bros invested time, labour and a little capital in their own mining venture. The Corowa Free Frees reported, on 30 August 1895, a Mines Department examination off the diggings which revealed 10 to 12 shafts sunk at the Redlands diggings and that McWilliam Bros were "down 40 feet with no sign of bottom" and although "the gold runs very evenly through the wash...the bottom rises and dips aggravatingly" and "washing is retarded by lack of water." There is no information about the return on McWilliam Bros' investment; however both the small consortiums and the Deep Lead Company gave up within a few years, frustrated by the low yield and by the difficulty of access to private property on which the lead appeared to run.

Visitors writing about their experience of a visit to Corowa invariably commented on the picturesqueness of the river and the pleasures of picnics on the banks, the wild life, especially the birds, and scenic walks. The McWilliams enjoyed these pleasures as well as the annual events such as the regattas and swimming matches, the yarns with crews of the riverboats and the fishing - and the shooting, out of the town limits.

The children attended the Corowa Public School where, in the building completed in 1878, Mr presided until replaced in 1883 by the indefatigable J.P. Buggy, teacher, farmer and vigneron who, during the 1890's became an associate of J.J.McWilliam in various activities in the district. Unlike the settlers in the Parish of Denison, Gippsland, Corowa had difficulty gathering together a Presbyterian congregation with sufficient numbers and funds to support a minister. The McWilliam children attended St John's Church of England Sunday School, the records showing that William and Eliza Jane received prizes for attendance in 1878 and, as late as 1889, Isabella was also a prize winner. A

resident Presbyterian minister arrived in 1885 and preparations began for the purchase of a site and erection of a church. The family was involved in a variety of fund raising activities in the Corowa School of Arts was a venue for meetings, concerts and drama presentations. Eliza Jane had both dramatic and musical talents and was in demand, especially as a singer, at concerts. Country towns offered opportunities for developing musical talents of children like Eliza Jane and Mary who became an outstanding pianist: pianos were commonplace - Palings of Sydney was the principal supplier - and piano teachers were available as were the usually itinerant piano tuners.

Although country life was basically healthy, the towns usually battled with two health hazards: purity of the water supply, with the associated threat of typhoid fever, and the provision of facilities for treatment during a major illness. J.C. Leslie, Samuel's younger neighbour and friend, maintained campaigns for many years in the columns of his newspaper on these themes which were also taken up by the Progress Association.

On 12 April 1889 the Corowa, Free Press reported a meeting of the P.A.& H., three days earlier, at which judges were appointed for the forthcoming show, There was also a long discussion at the meeting of a site for a hospital as the result of a representation from the Progress Association. F.C.Piggin moved and Samuel McWilliam seconded that five acres of land should be set aside for a hospital, to be located between J.C.Leslie's property, Braeside, and the Showground. Samuel's interest must have been quickened by his wife's illness: the following month the Corowa Free Press reported the death after a protracted and painful illness" of Mrs Martha McWilliam, at the age of 48 years, on Saturday 18 May. "She leaves five sons and four daughters to mourn her loss" the obituary continued. "Her funeral which took place on Monday last was, in spite of the inclement weather, attended by a very large number of Mr McWilliam's sympathizing friends.

Martha died of cancer after an illness of about twelve months in which the burden of the nursing must have fallen on Eliza Jane. Within two years Samuel had "retired" from Corowa to Blue Points Road, North Sydney, taking with him his four daughters, three of them still of school age. By that time 1891, he had already made other contributions to the development of Corowa and to the fortunes of his family; and there is evidence that he maintained his active interest in both during the following decade, up to the time of his death in Sydney in 1902.

The railway link with Sydney was one of the great issues in the district during the 1880's as Riverinans affected by the Victorian tariff were increasingly orientated towards the markets of Sydney and regional centres of population within their own colony. The member for Hume, Mr (later Sir) William Lyne, addressed a banquet gathering in Corowa on the subject of a link with the southern line in 1881, the year the railway reached Albury but the New South Wales government's decision was delayed by division of opinion in the district on the precise route and point of linkage and by doubts about the effects of extending a line to the border.

The Corowa Free Press fought one of its most vigorous battles for the cause of a railway link with Sydney via Culcairn and in the edition of 29 October 1886 reported that a meeting held in the School of Arts had attracted over 100 residents who had strongly supported J.C.Leslie's motion protesting against the failure of the New South Wales Legislative Council to pass a Bill passed in the lower house, authorising construction of the line from Corowa to Culcairn. Samuel McWilliam was reported in full as the seconder of the motion: he had "warmly attacked the action of the Upper House in treating the residents of the Riverina as 'aliens' and pointed out the absurdity of arguing that the line would divert traffic to Victoria when the whole control of that traffic had been in the hands of the sister colony for years."

Visits by politicians, including the venerable, massive Sir Henry Parkes, to Corowa, together with a series of petitions led to the re-opening of the question and in 1889 the Standing Committee on Public Works conducted a thorough enquiry into the effects of opening a line to Corowa, the best possible route and the costs of construction. A section of the Standing Committee visited Corowa on 7 September and took evidence, finalising their report on 10 September and recommending that the line should be built to Culcairn. The evidence given in the report is a treasure trove of information about the district: the land was worth on average about £3. per acre; the prosperity of the inhabitants of the district not only "speaks well for the settlers as a class but proves the richness of the soil and the permanency of the settlement; the agricultural society was a credit to the community; but progress was frustrated by poor communications - the roads were impassable in winter and many of the farms cultivated only a portion of their acreage because of the difficulty of reaching their markets;

most of the produce sold out of the district going in bond to Albury on Victorian rail via Wahgunyah, thence to Wagga, Hay, Goulburn and Sydney. Detailed information on farms within a ten mile radius of Corowa revealed that Samuel still retained in 1889 his original 480 acres and that his livestock included 10 horses, 17 cattle and 310 sheep.

Samuel himself could not have asked for a better site for the Corowa railhead and siding than that announced by the Standing Committee and adopted by the Government. And there can be no doubt that the experience of an adjacent railway siding, gained in Corowa after the railway link with Culcairn was opened in 1892, had a profound influence on the McWilliam fortunes and practices. "The Committee paid particular attention to the question of the selection of a site for the terminus of the line at Corowa" said the report, "and found that the inhabitants of the town ... were unanimously in favour of the station being erected at ... 'Bow's Paddock'... about a mile short of that (previously) selected by the railway authorities" in South Corowa. In other words the line not only passed between McWilliams Corner and the intersection of the main roads with Sanger Street, but the line terminated with its sidings a few hundred metres south east of McWilliam Corner, intersecting the present Bow Street, and providing the McWilliams with a very short haul to the loading points.

Wine-growing also occupied the attention of the Standing Committee. Assured the local identities such as J.C.Leslie, F.C. Piggin, auctioneer, and T.Bray, vigneron and storekeeper and by farmer witnesses that the line would encourage landholders to bring a considerable amount of uncultivated land into production, the Committee members visiting the district also observed the extent of viticulture and were not surprised to be told that the mere news that a rail link was contemplated had resulted in a dramatic increase in plantings. F.C. Piggin 's son was already about to plant 180 acres in vines; and there were stories of two separate intended plantings of 1,000 and 2,000 acre . About five hundred acres were already producing grapes in the district and over two-thirds of the production was for wine—making. Once the Sydney market and other inland towns were opened up by direct rail transport, without the expense of sending the wine or fruit through Melbourne or Albury, the industry would boom. In F.C. Piggin 's opinion - "when you have seen our country you will admit that it is to be the vineyard of the world."

Impressed, though more restrained, the Committee reported that in this "fertile district, in which agriculture is already flourishing… the wine-growing industry, which can only be said to be in its infancy in that part of the country, gives promise of being a highly remunerative one,"

It is not unlikely that when Samuel purchased his property, vines had already been planted by its original owner, S.A. Meyer who was one of the pioneer vignerons of the district. There is no documentary evidence that Samuel McWilliam planted vines in the year that he purchased his land and he was styled "farmer" not vigneron in the registers published during the 1880's. However there is a persistent family memory that vines were planted on the portion which became Sunnyside Vineyard in 1877, the year of purchase and also, the evidence suggests, the year of occupation. The planting of a few acres, initially, is consistent with the established practice of the district of planting vines and fruit trees for family use and to vary the source of income.

Samuel's obituary, written by his friend and fellow vigneron, J.C.Leslie, which appeared in the Corowa Free Press on 13 June 1902, referred to him as an "old and respected resident" who came from Gippsland, purchased a property "known as Sunnyside vineyard" and without previous experience in viticulture planted by degrees about 80 acres of vines and "by diligence and acumen made a name for Sunnyside wines."

By the late 1880's, at all events, Samuel's plantings were of sufficient dimension for him to join and become a committee member - of the Corowa Vine and Fruit Growers' Association. And there is evidence that he was already recognised as a competent and innovative wine-grower.

WINE