

**TALES OF TAVERNS
IN THE VICTORIA COLONY**

By Maurice Walsh

Tales of Taverns

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Tales of Taverns

INTRODUCTION

Once the roads were cut through the scrub, the mountains crossed and the rivers forded, the face of Victoria began to stir with life. Wherever it stirred the tavern was there, throbbing with the movement and the turmoil of languages and manners of scholars, merchants, soldiers, farm workers and pedlars. The stories of these people of every degree who thronged the yards and tap-rooms of a multitude of taverns tell much of the early days of young Victoria, where life centred on the village of Melbourne, before the lure of gold brought a torrent of seekers from across the sea to flood the infant colony. Here is the story of the beginnings of some of the best-known public houses in early Melbourne, on the pioneer roads which opened up the country, and on the goldfields of Ballarat and Bendigo.

References

The Chronicles of "Garryowen"

The Robert K. Cole Historical Papers in the State Library

Chapter 1
IN OLD MELBOURNE TOWN

The small man at the head of the dining table flourished a long knife and carving fork and announced "Table hotty today is boiled mutton and greens".

"Not again", groaned one of the expectant diners.

"Boiled mutton and greens I said, and if you don't like it you can go elsewhere", and John Pascoe Fawkner, owner of the only tavern in the village of Melbourne, began carving the uninviting joint.

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When owner of the Cornwall Hotel in Launceston, Fawkner had learned from John Batman of the attractions of the new territory across Bass Strait, and he decided to cross the water and explore its possibilities for himself.

Sailing up the Yarra in 1835, he landed at the site of the old Customs House in Flinders Street and, liking what he saw, he built a tavern on what is now the south east corner of William Street and Flinders Lane, which he designated "Fawkner's Hotel". Beside it he built a store and here he ruled as a little Caesar, inviting dissatisfied customers at his board to go elsewhere, which in those early days meant nowhere.

"Garryowen" described the edifice as being "of one and a half storeys the top half being a sleeping attic divided into sparse accommodation for respectable customers in small bedrooms, and a lower ground floor which faced the river. The bar and space for itinerants was at the back".

But the little man from across Bass Strait was to enjoy the tavern's delights and the privilege of being the village's sole dispenser of grog for only eighteen months, for the Sydney authorities resumed the land upon which the tavern was built as a site for a Customs House.

In 1836, after establishing a large farm across the river at what is now South Melbourne, Fawkner decided to return to Launceston on a business trip, leaving the tavern in the care of a friend, George Evans. Melbourne's first builder, Evans had built John Batman's house and "Fawkner's Hotel". However, shortly after Fawkner's departure the builder decided to take up land at what is now Sunbury. Before his departure he asked a friend, George Smith, to look after the tavern until Fawkner's return, and Smith agreed.

But when Fawkner returned three months later, Smith refused to surrender the property, claiming it was a gift to him from Evans. In the absence of a court, the nearest being many miles away in Sydney, to settle the matter the irascible little man from Launceston didn't mess about. He crossed the river to his farm at South Melbourne, loaded up some of his labourers with large bundles of hay and returned with them to the tavern. Used in relays the men flailed the sheaves for two days and two nights in the bar-parlor. After this incessant and nerve-wracking din, Smith fled the place and the resourceful owner moved in.

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On his arrival in the small village in 1836, Captain Lonsdale, who had been appointed Police Magistrate of the Port Phillip district, found that liquor was being sold in numerous taverns and shanties without a licence and he ordered that they be applied for immediately at a fee of twenty five pounds, similar to that being paid in New South Wales. This had the effect of closing a number of the grog shops.

The first three licences issued to the better class taverns were to George Smith, in Fawcner's absence, for Fawcner's Hotel; to Michael Carr for the Governor Bourke and to James Connell for the Royal Highlander. None of these houses lasted long. Fawcner's Hotel was razed after eighteen months trading and, due to the illness and subsequent deaths of their owners, the Governor Bourke and the Royal Highlander closed their doors after only two years trading.

After his ignominious defeat by Fawcner, George Smith joined Dr. Barry Cotter in building Melbourne's best tavern in 1837. More commodious than Fawcner's and others licensed in 1836, it was built north of Fawcner's in what is now Collins Street, and was named the Lamb Inn, the ancestor of Melbourne's greatest hotel - Scott's. For this place Smith was granted a transfer of the licence he was granted when "caretaker" of Fawcner's, nine months earlier.

The Lamb Inn became the centre of the young town and most of its sports people gathered there. The Melbourne Cricket Club was formed there in 1839, the first coroner's court was held there in 1841, and it was the polling place when the first representatives were elected for the Port Phillip District in the N.S.W. Legislative Council. Fawcner was one of those elected and "Garryowen" reported that the little man gave the Sydneysiders some hurry up at his first appearance there. But, despite its promising beginning, the Lamb Inn still awaited the advent of a live-wire waiter named Edward Scott, who was to make it Melbourne's greatest hotel.

When Edward Umphelby built the Angel Inn on the north east corner of Collins and Queen Streets late in 1837, he became George Smith's greatest rival in the hotel business. The Angel boasted three parlors, six bedrooms and the town's first billiards room, but Umphelby had little bent for the town life, so he leased it and headed north for the bush. A true pioneer, he sold the present site of David Jones in Bourke Street for a mare and foal to accompany him. Before his appearance in Melbourne he had traded with a lugger in the Timor Sea and it was he who brought the first buffaloes to the Northern Territory.

After the take over of his first "hotel", Fawcner was not long out of the hotel business. On what is now the eastern corner of Collins and Market Streets he built a large public house and beside it the home of Melbourne's first printed newspaper, the Patriot, which later became Australia's greatest paper, the Argus. Before the Patriot was introduced he had come forth with the Advertiser, handwritten, which lasted a twelvemonth. Fawcner edited the Patriot as a fiery independent and soon became a driving force in the fast growing community.

This second house of Fawkner's had a chequered history. A weatherboard structure, it became the clubhouse of the later famous Melbourne Club when Fawkner sold the premises in 1839, after announcing his retirement from business. Seven years later it was licensed again under the sign Old Club House, but a year later it became the Shakespeare. In 1856 it again became de-licensed when the premises were leased to the Union Club. Under this sign it was again licensed in 1869 and it finally closed in 1936 when the A.M.P. society bought it.

It is unlikely that one would associate the Presbyterian and Methodist churches with public houses, yet in early Melbourne there were two such cases.

In 1836, James Clow, Melbourne's first Presbyterian minister, brought a curious little frame building with him from Tasmania and he put it together in Lonsdale Street, near Swanston Street. After two years in the pulpit there, he resigned his ministry to raise sheep in the northern country and the place was sold to become the Caledonian Inn - a very apt name indeed. In 1845 it was converted to a temperance hotel, more in keeping with its origin. And the new manager had the unlikely name of Tankard!

Melbourne's first Wesleyan chapel was built on the corner of Swanston Street and Flinders Lane in 1840 but Thomas Monaghan bought it in 1847. Beside it he built a house which he licensed as the Queen's Arms and the chapel became the kitchen of the new tavern! In 1860 Benjamin Champion bought the property and, as Champion's, it remained in his family's hands for 56 years, which is surely a record.

Three years after Fawkner had built his "hotel" near the Yarra, the town was growing rapidly and Melbourne's three thousand people were importing thousands of gallons of rum and whisky. Champagne was tossed off in tankards and three "breweries" were flourishing, mainly to meet the thirsts of mostly young men, hard riding and hard living, who had few other diversions. Scores of taverns and grog-shops sprang up to share in the revels and profits, but few survived for long.

Thomas Halfpenny was a versatile businessman. On the south west corner of Elizabeth Street and Little Collins Street he built a new licensed house in 1838, which he called the William Tell. Here he brewed his own beer, and set up a registry office - "where the characters of both employer and employee would be thoroughly investigated and their commissions would be executed with fidelity and promptness". Halfpenny became a Chief Constable in 1845 and surrendered the licence. He was the first of scores of top ranking policemen to have association with public houses in the following decade.

The next substantial house to be licensed after Fawkner's second one was the Eagle Tavern on the south west corner of Bourke and Queen Streets. A Scottish migrant named James Jamieson built it in 1840, and he also financed the erection of Melbourne's first theatre on land adjoining the tavern. The theatre measured 65 ft. by 35 ft. and, with furnishings, cost more than one thousand pounds. Well conducted in a business-like manner by the canny Scot, both ventures proved very popular with an entertainment-starved populace. Re-named the Britannia in 1948, the hotel was razed in 1961.

Henry Baker opened the Imperial in Collins Street between Elizabeth and Queen Streets in 1840, which he rightly claimed to be the best hotel in the town.

Henry remained in Collins Street for ten years before retreating to the wild bush of Heidelberg, where, in 1850, he built the Old England tavern.

The founder of Port Melbourne was William Liardet, a retired British army man, and an artist, who built a licensed house on the beach front at the foot of today's Bay Street, in 1840. On the roof he raised a tall lighted beacon, which guided ships up the bay - surely the only lighthouse on a pub roof in the world!

Liardet also established Melbourne's first mail coach service, and prospered by victualling the ships in the bay. When Melbourne's first artist transferred his house licence to his sons in 1846, the tavern was known as the Brighton Pier. Today it is known as the Pier Hotel, which may claim to have the oldest existing licence in Victoria.

Three new houses licensed in 1841 were the Royal, the Elephant and Castle and the London Inn. The first, on the south east corner of Collins and Elizabeth Streets, was opened by John Cowell, who transferred the licence to an American, Samuel Moss, in 1853. To cater for the goldrush newcomers to the town, Moss re-modelled the premises and it then boasted a billiards room, bath house (a real luxury), a bowling alley and a vaudeville theatre. It was very popular with the town's business men and visiting Americans. It closed in 1877 when bought by the Union Bank.

Matthew Cantlon, who was to become famous in the town nine years later as the owner of the Bull and Mouth in Bourke Street, was granted a licence for the Elephant and Castle, in Little Bourke Street, which he held for seven years before going to Geelong. There he built the Royal Hotel and a theatre in 1848, but returned to Melbourne soon afterwards.

The London Inn arose in Market Street from the rubble of Melbourne's first candle factory, the licensee being Francis Hobson. Facing the site of Fawkner's first "hotel", close by, it had behind it in Flinders Lane the Ship Inn, Melbourne's second licensed tavern. Today it holds the second longest licence in Victoria. It was re-built in 1852 and again in 1923.

It is a coincidence in reverse that the London Inn was built on the site of a factory providing Melbourne's light, and that one hundred years later the S.E.C. built its offices on the site of Fawkner's first tavern.

As the town extended, mainly to the north and east, public houses led the settlement. Queen Street had a number, chief of which was St. John's Tavern, on the south west corner of Little Bourke Street, which was built by John Smith, in 1842.

One of the town's notables who later held the licence for Smith's house was John Conway Bourke who, in 1838, had set off from the Lamb Inn with the first mail bag to Sydney to exchange with a mailman from there at Yass, to brave the dangers from hostile aborigines, flooded rivers and the bush. After retiring as Melbourne's mailman, he took over the tavern and re-named it the Carpentaria, claiming that he was the first to suggest to John O'Hara Burke the ill-fated journey with Wills to the Gulf. Known later as the Beaufort, the building was razed many years ago.

When the "new" Sydney road, barely a bush track, was opened in the early 1840's, many taverns fringed it and the best of them, the Retreat, survives today. Opened in 1842 by Mrs. Amelia Shaw, with weighbridge adjacent, it was the first house licensed north of Melbourne. Alfred Cornwell, later owner of the famous potteries, bought it and became the licensee in 1864.

In 1843 and 1844 there was a mushroom growth of taverns and grogshops in the centre of the town, "Garryowen" reporting nine in Little Bourke Street between Elizabeth and Queen Streets! But good ones were being built, too, and one of these was the Royal Exchange in Collins Street. It was licensed to James Perry, who must have been a man of infinite tact, for both the Freemasons and St. Patrick's Society made it their headquarters! And, when the local publicans decided to unite, the Licensed Victuallers Association was formed there in 1850.

Chapter 2 IMPROVEMENT IN THE TAVERNS

In the first eight years of Melbourne's growth from village to town status the multitude of taverns had provided little in the way of accommodation but, by the mid 1840's, there had been a decided change for the better, due to a Swanston Street licensee, Kenneth Bethune.

Granted a licence for the Star, on the south east corner of Little Bourke Street, Bethune was the first to advertise accommodation, thus: "We offer three sitting-rooms and parlours and ten bedrooms available to the public, excellent board at our hotel." So to this enterprising licensee of the Star, which was later named the Cosmopolitan, goes the credit for raising the tavern to the status of hotel. Bethune's fellow keepers of the better taverns were quick to follow his lead when they saw his immediate success. A year later in 1843, the Friend in Hand, later known as the Hunt Club, in Little Collins Street, the Duke of Kent, first licensed in Lonsdale Street but later transferred to its present site in Latrobe Street, and the Baker's Arms, later known as the House of Commons, in Elizabeth Street, were all re-built and their accommodation was greatly extended.

These improvements allowed the tavern-keepers to cater for the lodger as well as the drinker and the accommodation situation improved when better class houses such as the Black Boy, now the Royal Arcade, in Little Collins Street, was built in 1845, and to the west of it across Elizabeth Street the Waterman's Arms, later the Grosvenor and now the Hub Pub, was licensed in 1846. In the same year two others were newly licensed, the Centenary, opposite the hospital in Lonsdale Street, and the Bazaar, later the Australian, half-way up the hill in Bourke Street, which both advertised excellent board for lodgers.

Other substantial houses licensed in the following year were the White Hart, in Spring Street, the Clare Castle in Exhibition Street, the Occidental in Collins Street and the Cross Keys, later the Continental, at the corner of Russell and Lonsdale Streets. In a day when closing hours were rather elastic, the Cross Keys was granted Melbourne's first night licence, 11.30 p.m. until 4 a.m. The site of the Occidental, which between the wars was one of the city's leading hotels, is now occupied by the Reserve Bank building.

Two houses licensed in 1848 were interesting mainly because of the men associated with them as licensees - William Sugden and James Richardson. Built on the south east corner of Bourke and Swanston Streets, the Royal Mail was famous for beautifully attired barmaids, rivalled only by those across the street at the Orient Hotel.

The second prominent licensee mentioned, James Richardson, had the licence of the Australia Felix at the turn of the century after its chequered history of fifty years since Robert Sayers built it on the north east corner of Bourke and Russell Streets. Formerly a "useful" at the old White Hart, now the Windsor Annexe, in Spring Street, Richardson took it over and for many years it was known as "Richardson's", before he became famous as the owner of many Melbourne hotels, the chief of which was the Savoy Plaza, which he built in Spencer Street.

A two-storey tavern, possibly known to more newcomers to the young colony than any other, arose on the south east corner of Queen and Latrobe Streets in 1848, and it was licensed as the Royal Oak by William Morte. It became so well known because, four years later, it was the town's main departure point for thousands of gold-seekers setting off for the "diggings" of Ballarat and Bendigo. The bullock yard of the Royal Oak, later known as the New Union Club, farewelled hundreds of goldfields vehicles every week. George Evans, Melbourne's first builder and a friend of Fawkner, held the licence from 1860 until 1865. He died in 1876. His widow erected the present solid building, which is now the home of the Celtic Club, in 1877.

A tavern which passed through more troublesome times than most other licensed houses of the time was the Cosmopolitan, built in 1848 on the north west corner of Lonsdale and Swanston Streets. In the following seventeen years it had twelve licensees, and three forced auctions under bills of sale orders. Formerly known as the Britannia, the present hotel trades under the sign Mansion House.

Among other better class houses established at this time were the Carrier's Arms, later the Elizabeth, now closed, on the corner of Elizabeth Street and Little Lonsdale Street, and the Supreme Court, now the City Court, which was licensed in 1849 at the corner of Latrobe and Russell Streets. Opposite Police Headquarters and the City Court, the latter house has always been known as "the bobbies' pub". These were the last of the excellent houses of the period before the advent of Matthew Cantlon and his Bull and Mouth in Bourke Street in 1850.

After Henry Baker a decade before, Cantlon was surely the top public relations man among those in Melbourne's liquor trade. After opening the Elephant and Castle in Melbourne in 1841 and seven years later the Royal at Geelong, he returned to build the famous Bull and Mouth in Bourke Street in 1850, which was described by "Garryowen" as being "a splendid edifice with twelve bedrooms, three sitting rooms, three ample taprooms and parlours and a commodious dining room open to the public."

Behind it was built a small hall, very popular as a gymnasium where, thirty years afterwards, the great English gypsy boxer, Jem Mace, gave lessons to, in his own words, "gentlemen interested in learning the noble art from a master of the Fancy". Mace could be forgiven his boast for he had been undefeated as world champion for seventeen years.

Cantlon's public relations approach lay in advertising as did Baker's, but he addressed the business community in unusual advertisements such as: "Garryowen" quotes - "At the Bull and Mouth a cook would be at his post from 9 a.m. until midnight; tables would be furnished with food and refreshment for 500 people at 24 hours notice and tradesmen and others, including teetotallers, will be accommodated with silver, from one to one hundred pounds at all times, without charge and without obligation".

A great businessman, born to his vocation, Cantlon prospered particularly in the early goldrush days, when goldfields coaches left the booking office, now David Jones store, opposite his house, which was usually crowded for many bibulous farewells. The Bull and Mouth site is now occupied by a small movie theatre, near the corner of Swanston Street.

At a land sale in 1837, John Hodgson bought an allotment in Flinders Street, facing the river, for sixty-five pounds and on it a year later he built a private residence of twenty-seven rooms, which was by far the largest dwelling in the settlement. He named it "Yarra House", but it was derisively called "Hodgson's Folly" which appears apt for, after three years occupancy, he retired to the country after letting the property to members of the Port Phillip Club. However, the club soon folded and, in 1844, it was opened as a residence for young ladies. This venture folded too, and eventually it became the "Yarra Boardinghouse".

In 1850 the commodious building took the fancy of Edward Scott, a young waiter at the top-class Royal Hotel in Collins Street and, after making minor alterations to the frontage, he was granted a licence for the house. And thus began the career of a man destined to be, for the next thirty years, the greatest influence for good in the hotel business of the town, and later city. Opened as the Port Phillip Hotel, this house did much to alleviate the accommodation problem when the goldrush began. The house continued to trade until it was razed some years ago to make way for the Port Phillip Arcade.

The trend towards better houses continued in Collins Street where Henry Baker's old Imperial was re-built on a larger scale, emerging as the Grand Imperial in 1851. First class accommodation was offered and it became very popular with the fortunate ones returning from the "diggings". Lola Montez, the diggers' favourite (if notorious) actress held court there, and gold nuggets were common currency. The Commonwealth Bank now stands on the site of a really splendid hotel of its day.

John Passmore, who had the licence for the Shakespeare, which had originally been Fawkner's second house in Collins Street, was granted a licence for a large place in Elizabeth Street on the corner of Lonsdale Street, known as Hockin's Hotel. Containing forty-one rooms, four parlours and a ballroom, it was the centre of the social life of Melbourne and rivalled the Grand Imperial with the town's businessmen.

When the goldrush started for Ballarat, Passmore, with keen forethought, opened a booking office at the hotel for passengers to the "diggings" and the first coach left there on October 6th, 1851. The service, first run by James Watt, of the Border Inn, Bacchus Marsh, was later taken over by the famous Cobb and Co. Known as the Commonwealth Hotel in 1901, the house was razed in 1936 and Mitchell House was built on the site.

Chapter 3
POST GOLDRUSH BUILDING

Licensed houses with greater accommodation were urgently needed twelve months after the gold discovery at Ballarat when hundreds of "diggers", unsuccessful on the fields, returned to the town to swell its rapidly growing population. Although the great majority of them were settled under canvas on the outskirts of the town, particularly across the river, a great number preferred the comfort of the taverns and so began the second and greater resurgence of the residential and it began, as history proved, in the right place - the Lamb Inn.

George Smith's and Dr. Cotter's tavern had, since its opening in 1837 attracted most of the town's "society" in its formative years and had been the centre of most of the better class entertainment such as that reported by "Garryowen" in 1839 - "At the Lamb, on Christmas Eve, Mrs. Clark, one of the leading lights of the Sydney stage, gave a grand soiree with vocal and instrumental items and the admission was ten shillings".

But after bursting at the seams for fifteen years it was demolished, having proved inadequate for its booming business, and a two-storey house replaced it in 1852. Named the Clarendon Family, the new hotel had sixteen rooms, three parlours and three taprooms and it was licensed to its builder, William Moreton. The structure survived until 1914, when a three-storey brick building replaced it.

After Moreton there were a number of licensees until, in 1861, Edward Scott sold his Port Phillip Club in Flinders Street and, under this name, started business in Collins Street. However the house soon became known as "Scott's". Under this famous hotelkeeper it flourished as Melbourne's best house for superior accommodation and for a hundred years, yielded the title to no other.

In the following year an interesting tavern, known as "Mac's" was built north of the main business area in Franklin Street. Of sturdy bluestone, its substantial outbuildings were used to hold "gentlemen of the road", arrested for the many hold-ups of the coaches carrying gold from Ballarat and Bendigo. Quarters for the constabulary were adjacent to the cells and, said "Garryowen", "the place resembled a police barracks with a beer licence". "Mac's" did a brisk business in its early years as one of the main departure points for coaches for the goldfields.

When ten o'clock closing for hotels was introduced in Victoria hotelkeepers were quick to introduce entertainment with drinking in the lounges, but the idea is not new. In 1853 Joel Bushby was granted a licence for the Royal Charter in Bourke Street, near Queen Street and, reports "Garryowen", "the new building was complete with concert hall and stage. The seating was high forms of wood with high backs on which were ledges where the glasses of those seated behind could rest, enabling drinking and smoking to be enjoyed while entertainment proceeded. Admission was one shilling, which included a drink or smoke, and attentive waiters moved among the patrons".

However, Mr. Bushby's enterprise paid off in the wrong direction, for the entertainment attracted the rough element in the community and soon the place was closed. It was re-opened in 1864 by two bookmakers, named Coleman and Thompson, under the sign Tattersalls, and the concert hall became the "Casino de Venice".

It was lavishly furnished and was conducted in a much better manner than previously but, after a gaming scandal had been ventilated in the police court, the owners retired and the place was closed down.

Early in 1853 the Argus announced: "At the foot of William Street Eugene McLaughlin is building a modern hotel, brick of three storeys and twenty rooms which, next year, will be an ornament among licensed houses in this progressive town".

The site was historic for John Batman had paid seventy-five pounds for it at Melbourne's first land sale in 1837. McLaughlin, who had bought the property in 1848, opened the new hotel in 1854 as the Yarra Family and, until it was razed some years ago to make way for the new Customs House, it enjoyed an excellent reputation for accommodation and service.

Meanwhile, lesser public houses grew fast in number, but not in quality. One such was the Princes Bridge, now known to us as Young and Jackson's. A picture of it taken in the 1870's, when John Mooney was licensee, looked very much like McNall's butcher shop it was before being licensed; in fact much as today's grog shop looks. Its only saving grace is a number of paintings which Young, of the famous partnership, bought to adorn the place when he and Jackson, successful New Zealand miners, bought the licence in the 1880's.

The Yarra Family was the last of the good residentials built in "old" Melbourne town for, twenty years after John Batman sailed up the Yarra to con the aborigines out of a place for a village, the town had grown rapidly and counted its population in thousands. The "diggings" which founded its fortunes were four years old and the town had benefitted also from the pioneers who had opened up the country to the south-west and the north, and who now provided much of its food.

But the "new" town had to wait another decade to fully appreciate the vision of two great hoteliers, Edward Scott, who made "Scott's" Melbourne's greatest hotel, and James Menzies, who forsook the small Empire Tavern in Latrobe Street to move west and build the ancestor of that great pile which crumbled to dust some years ago in William Street. With great foresight and endeavour, Scott and Menzies indeed built well on the foundation laid by the old tavern in old Melbourne town.

Chapter 4
THE SYDNEY ROAD

After the survey of the "new" Sydney road in 1840 and its opening soon afterwards, Mr. C. B. Clapp ran the first coach northwards along what was little better than a bush track and the coach passengers wet their whistles at the scores of taverns and bush shanties which sprang up along the fringes of the track.

About three miles from the town, the Retreat tavern, with weighbridge attached, was first licensed to Mrs. Amelia Shaw in 1842. Her father, George Stanway, took it over in 1846, and he and his family held its licence for sixteen years. The hotel still trades today.

Four other taverns later licensed in the vicinity were the Brunswick on the east side, and the Sarah Sands, the Cornish Arms and the Edinburgh Castle on the west side. The Sarah Sands was named for the ship which brought its builder to Melbourne.

The Golden Fleece was licensed at Pentridge, now Coburg, in 1842, and William Sidebottom was granted a beer and wine licence. The Coburg Hotel occupies the site today opposite Pentridge Gaol.

The Somerton Inn was opened by Francis de Sancto in 1844, but the licence was held in 1847 by George Vinge, who had retired from the police force in 1841 to take over the Golden Fleece in Bourke Street. His observation from the Somerton Inn and later the Kilmore Inn of the increasing traffic on the road led him to partner George Foster as one of the pioneer coaching businesses catering for passengers travelling north. They advertised their "Royal Mail Daily Despatch Line" to leave Great Bourke Street at 5.45 a.m. daily and arriving at Beechworth on the following morning at 9 o'clock.

Along the road were some substantial houses such as the Carrier's Arms at Rocky Waterholes (Craigieburn) which, built of stone, had nine bedrooms and four sitting rooms, exclusive of those required by the licensee's family. It was built by Edward Bradley and licensed in 1844.

At Kinlochewe, north of Craigieburn, an inn of that name had fourteen bedrooms and four sitting rooms, and had 160 acres of land. The licence was first granted to Francis Morison in 1841, but William Kent, who had built the Post Office building in Little Collins Street in 1840, had the licence 1844 - 1847, before taking over the Strangways Tavern at Wallan Wallan in 1851 and holding it for sixteen years. At Thom's Station (Beveridge), Anthony Beveridge had the licence for the Hunter's Tryst tavern in 1841.

Twelve months before John Conway Bourke took the first mail across the Murray, John Mitton came down from the Goulburn district with a mob of cattle and, liking what he saw in the country around where Kilmore now stands, he settled there. Five years later, in 1846, he was granted a licence for a house which he called the Currency Lad, in opposition to the Kilmore Inn, licensed five years before.

Re-built in 1848 by Reay Clarke, it was re-named the Dunrobin Castle and, in the same year Henry Morris transferred his licence for the Kilmore Inn across the stone track to a substantial stone house, which offered travellers excellent accommodation. The third tavern in the district was the Royal Oak, first licensed in 1848, which was taken over by Matthew Murray in 1860. In 1852 Murray had the McIvor Inn on the McIvor "diggings" and subsequently three taverns in Melbourne. The Murrays held the licence for the Royal Oak for thirty years.

At Stewart's Station, on Sunday Creek, now Broadford, Reay Clarke, who had surrendered his licence at Kilmore, built a house which he licensed under the sign Broadford Inn, in 1843.

John Clark, who had come south from Yass in 1838 with cattle, settled on the river at Seymour and built a tavern, which he called the Travellers Rest, in 1842. He also built a punt service to cater for the road traffic which grew steadily.

Gilbert Nichol held the licence for the Seymour Tavern in 1845. A large stone house, it had fourteen bedrooms, five parlours and a large tap-room, built on two acres of ground. Nichol followed Clark in providing a punt service with whale and flat-bottomed boats. In addition he built a wharf with complete fittings, and a commodious stockyard where cattle sales were held regularly.

The main road between Benalla and Wangaratta crossed the Three Mile Creek by way of Greta to avoid steep Rowan's Gap. Ned Kelly's home was at Greta, six miles from Glenrowan, and Ambrose Holway opened the Goldseeker's Inn there in 1853. Two others there in the same year were the El Dorado and the Union.

At Glenrowan, which was named for the Rowan brothers, who had a property there, the township comprised the dwellings of the twenty-five people who lived there, and the Glenrowan Inn, which was on the Sydney road.

However, when the Benalla - Wodonga section of the railway was completed, a second inn was built there. It was a small wooden structure of three bedrooms, a dining room and a bar, which opened on to a verandah in front, and it was here in June, 1880, that three members of the infamous Kelly gang perished and Kelly was arrested when the place was burnt down by the police. Mrs. Margaret Jones had the licence at the time.

In 1838, John Rattray arrived at what was known for many years as the Ovens Crossing, now Wangaratta, and built a wattle and daub hut which he opened as a store. Two years later William Clark, who had driven cattle south from Yass, took over the business and built on the bank of the river, near today's Sydney Hotel, the Hope Inn. Beside it he later established a punt service, which was eventually bought by the Sydney authorities who, due to the great increase in traffic on the mainroad, decided to build a bridge, which was opened in 1855.

The second tavern here was built by James Bond on the opposite side of the river in 1843. This house was later known as the Wangaratta and when re-built in 1852 was the second brick tavern in the town, the Dan O'Connell being the first. The third was the Royal, which had originally been the town's hospital.

Owner of the first punt to ply for trade down the river, John Crisp, built the Australian in 1853 and its licence remained in the Crisp family for many years before being closed by the Licensing Board in 1912.

There is no record of licences issued at this time to taverns beyond the Ovens Crossing, the country north to the Murray River being familiar only to itinerant drivers of stock, and the Melbourne to Yass and return mailmen.

Chapter 5 THE WESTERN ROAD

In the early 1850's, when hundreds of ships disgorged thousands of gold-hungry settlers at Geelong and Melbourne, the western road beckoned them to fortune. Those from Melbourne travelled in carts, waggons, on horseback and on foot via North Geelong to Ballarat, where the precious metal had been found in 1851, for the road through Bacchus Marsh had not yet been surveyed.

The early road to Geelong was by way of Solomon's Ford, high up on the Maribyrnong or Saltwater river but, in 1849, Michael Lynch provided a punt near the south-east part of what is now Flemington racecourse, and the distance was shortened considerably.

Nearby, the Punt Hotel, now the Pioneer, was opened by Lynch when the punt was placed in service and he held the licence until 1855, when a bridge replaced the punt. Known as Lynch's bridge it was a sturdy wooden affair, which gave excellent service until it gave way for the present concrete structure.

The first of the taverns south-west of the Pioneer was the Werribee River, then known as the River Ex. A year later the Golden Fleece was opened by George Greeves, but there were no good taverns in the district until some years afterwards, but the story at Little River was different.

The Little River Tavern was licensed to George Coppock in 1839 and James Bourhill had the Traveller's Rest there in 1840, the accommodation of which was greatly increased in the following year. The licence was held in turn by George Connor, James Purcell and William Perrin until 1851, when it was burned down. In the following year it was re-built in time to serve a multitude of travellers to the "diggings". In 1846 Coppock re-built the Little River, which was close to the railway station, of bluestone on 28 acres including an orchard. It was a tavern of many parts for it had six bedrooms, three parlours and large bar, and extensive stabling to cater for travellers. Beside the tavern he built a brick store, a bakehouse and a butcher's shop. It could truly be said that George Connor was the leader of the small community.

In the next twenty-five miles the traveller found no tavern to welcome him, but at Cowie's Creek, now North Geelong, the Ocean Child opened its doors. Built of brick, with nine bedrooms and four sitting rooms, it was licensed in March, 1852, by James Knight, who had sailed into Corio Bay as master of the barque, Ocean Child. The crew having deserted the ship to join the gold-rush, the ship was anchored offshore and the master resigned. Liking the locality, he built the tavern and named it for his ship.

At the Ocean Child the pilgrims turned west to join the Geelong - Buninyong road, the last stage to their El Dorado. At Batesford, where the road crossed the Moorabool river, Andrew Stewart opened the Moorabool Inn in 1842 and a year later the Golden Fleece tavern was licensed to Henry Lawler, captain of the barque Aphrasia, an early arrival in Corio Bay. After the Traveller's Rest was opened in 1849 by John Primrose, a licence was granted to Edward Butler for the Derwent Tavern in 1850 and to John Kelly for a new house under the sign Toll Bar Inn in 1855. Kelly still had the licence in 1864 but the sign had been changed to the restful Wait-a-While Hotel.

Michael O'Meara was the licensee of the Separation Inn at the junction of the Buninyong and Leigh roads in 1850, and just beyond the township, James Wallace was granted a licence for the Eureka Inn in 1854, which sheltered hundreds of gold-seekers in the golden days of the beckoning road.

Six years later at Lethbridge, fifteen miles north of the Moorabool river crossing, Wallace built the Lethbridge Hotel, which had nine bedrooms, four sitting rooms and a large bar. At that time the township had three other inns, the most important of which was the Victoria with eleven bedrooms and five sitting rooms, the licensee being John Connelly. Mortimer Guinane had the Tall Tree, and John Jones was owner and licensee of the Railway.

The largest house outside Melbourne in 1864 was the Clyde Hotel, to which Jones had transferred his licence, and for some years it had a roaring business. It had thirty rooms and dining accommodation for one hundred people. Its stables sheltered twenty horses and the extent of its business may be gauged from the fact that eight coaches stopped there daily, and their passengers were provided with breakfast, dinner or supper according to their timetable.

Beyond Lethbridge to Buninyong there were only a number of insignificant taverns which offered little accommodation, possibly because the eager gold-seekers wasted little time on the road once the land of promise was in sight, for when they got there it would be a case of "first come, first served".

The opening of the Geelong-Ballararat railway meant the closure of a number of the many houses trading on the road. The Argus, in 1866, stated; "The old landmarks on the Geelong - Ballarat road are gradually disappearing. The Toll Bar is closed up; where the Eureka used to be is now a mere waste, while the Separation Inn, where so much money was made in the golden days, is now in a sad state of repair, and merely a beer-shop".