

**TALES OF TAVERNS
IN THE VICTORIA COLONY**

By Maurice Walsh

Tales of Taverns

CONTENTS

Chapter 1	In old Melbourne Town
Chapter 2	Improvement in the Taverns
Chapter 3	Post Goldrush Building
Chapter 4	The Sydney Road
Chapter 5	The Western Road
Chapter 6	The Ballarat Goldfield
Chapter 7	The Bendigo Scene
Chapter 8	Personalities of old Melbourne Town
Chapter 9	Policemen became Tavern Keepers
Chapter 10	When the Orange met the Green
Chapter 11	Tavern Entertainments
Chapter 12	The Belles of Bourke Street
Chapter 13	Sport was Sponsored in the Taverns
Chapter 14	Inn Signs were Meaningful and Varied
Chapter 15	Crime at the Tavern

Supplementary

Melbourne's Breweries Before the Amalgamation
Brewing's Long History

Chapter 6
THE BALLARAT GOLDFIELD

Among the thousands who flocked to the goldfields of Ballarat and Bendigo to seek their fortunes, there were many intent on trading with the newcomers rather than seeking the precious metal from the earth - storekeepers and grog-sellers, and they prospered exceedingly. The latter were not too particular about what they sold the "diggers" from their unlicensed shanties, but owners of well-conducted houses fared very well before the tide of seekers had run its course. Although rudely-built, these places reflected the finer thoughts of the owners about how the populace should be treated and their comfortable houses offered shelter to the traveller in addition to slaking his thirst.

The date of the discovery of gold in Victoria was officially recognised as July 5th, 1851, and all goldfields were proclaimed Crown Lands upon which publicans' licences would not be granted. Gold discoveries had been made at several places, but on August 25th, 1851, Frederick Brown made his momentous discovery on a sheep run, which undoubtedly led to the establishment of Ballarat.

The first sale of residential sites in the township was held at Geelong in 1852 and twenty blocks were sold, two of which being purchased by Thomas Bath for one hundred and thirty pounds. On one of them he built a single storey house and, when the licensing restrictions were lifted in the following year, he was granted a publican's licence at the cost of one hundred pounds for the house, which opened as Bath's Hotel, on July 1st, 1853. This is generally accepted as Ballarat's first tavern but there is doubt for, although there was no other tavern between Buninyong and the township, on the corner of what are now Lydiard and Dana Streets a large hut was kept by one Meek, who drew pen and ink sketches of Victoria. According to a local historian, both houses were licensed in 1853, Meek's as the Trooper's Arms, but his was claimed to be the first built in Ballarat, and he was trading in it as a storekeeper in 1851.

In 1858, Walter Craig took over Bath's house, re-built it and named it the Royal, which subsequently became known as Craig's, Ballarat's leading house. Craig died in 1870, and thereby hangs a tale, for a little time before his death he told friends at the hotel that he had dreamed that his horse, Nimblefoot, had won the Melbourne Cup and that his rider wore black armbands. Two weeks after his death Nimblefoot duly won the Cup, and his rider wore black armbands for the deceased Mr. Craig.

The late 'fifties saw the liquor trade booming on the goldfields, and the mines were pouring our dividends. In 1857 the tavern licence fee was reduced from one hundred pounds to twenty-five, which brought a considerable increase in the number of licences issued. In 1860 there were 477 licenced houses in Ballarat but, in the next decade, the number fell to 250.

An interesting tavern was licensed in August, 1854, in Main Road by William Irvine and James McCrae. It was a wooden building with a small concert hall attached and was prominent as the meeting place of the committee conducting the preparations for the Eureka resistance movement. It was here that, subsequently, the papers and reports relating to the Stockade affair were burned. Known as the Star, the tavern and concert hall were destroyed by fire in 1860.

As entertainment for the "diggers" in the roaring 'fifties, many taverns advertised a "free and easy" every night at which music and vocal items were provided and every tavern had its bagatelle table and skittles alley. Although most of them could boast only canvas walls, they had concert halls which were also used as ballrooms and meeting places.

A police inspector, John Ryall, was very keen on his job when examining liquor licence applications. When Alfred Lewis applied for transfer of his licence for the Ivy Green tavern to John Cohn, Ryall suggested that Cohn did not want the licence for himself, but to hold it for another person. The bench granted the licence, saying that the character of the applicant was the only matter which interested it. The doughty inspector again missed out when objecting that an applicant for a licence was under age. George Matthews applied for the licence of Cohn's tavern mentioned and it was granted because the Act did not make provision for the age of a licensee. In those days apparently the Licensing Act was not as severe as it is today.

A Cornishman, Henry Williams, held the licence for the Mount's Bay inn in South Ballarat, in 1868, after having been manager of the Burra Burra mine since 1860. He took the licence of the Redan Club in Skipton Street, in 1884, after purchasing the property. Apparently the Mount's Bay had also been a goldmine!

Andrew Michelson had the Southern Cross near the Eureka Stockade in 1857, but transferred the licence to premises in Sturt Street known as Lester's, in 1860. The house became Carlyon's in the following year when Thomas Carlyon, of Collingwood, took over from Lou Phillips. Here Carlyon learned the business so well, apparently, that his family later became famous as hotelkeepers and caterers in Melbourne.

The fire fighters had their busiest time in 1862 when a series of outbreaks destroyed twenty dwellings including eight hotels, most of which, through re-building, had gone through the tavern stage. They included the King's Head and the Lord Nelson in Main Road and the Miner's Restaurant, late the Golden Age Hotel, next to it. At the time the Lord Nelson was considered the best hotel in East Ballarat.

A recently built hotel, the Greenock, although of brick, also fell a victim to the flames. It had been burned down as an old timber building twelve months before! On the opposite side of the Main Road a two-storey house, the Bazaar, and the Belfast, which previously had been the gold office of the Bank of Australia, also succumbed to the flames, before the Sawyer's Arms in Hummfray Street caught fire and was destroyed. A news-sheet of the day reviewing the numerous conflagrations said: "whether or not a mad Rechabite is on the loose, many bonifaces must sleep ill o' nights in Ballarat".

Twenty years after Frederick Brown found gold, thousands of those in the early rush had drifted away from Ballarat to seek the precious metal elsewhere or take up land and, during the depression of the early 'seventies, the hotelkeepers had a parlous time, the 1874 Year Book showing 467 of them had filed Bills of Sale.

Chapter 7
THE BENDIGO GOLDFIELD

Although gold was discovered at Bendigo in the same year as that of Ballarat, the field in its early days did not extend to anything the same extent and it was not until three years later that the first liquor licence was granted on the northern field, but it was granted to a house which was to become the largest hotel outside Melbourne.

A property at which the Gold Exchange business had been conducted was converted to a tavern by John Crowley and William Heffernan in 1854 and was Bendigo's first licensed house. Named the Shamrock, in its first two years it returned the owners twenty thousand pounds and, after additions in 1859 and 1863, it comprised more than one hundred rooms. Completely re-built between 1897 and 1900, it closed in the 1960's, but was bought by the State Government in 1975 and, after renovations, was re-opened.

Like Ballarat, the township was over-run by grog shanties, but gradually a few good houses emerged to cater for travellers, one of which was the Criterion, in Market Square, built by Joseph Cohn in 1853. When the Governor, Sir Charles Hotham, visited the goldfield, he stayed at the Criterion in 1854. Cohn relinquished the licence in the following year and, in partnership with his two brothers, he established the Victoria Brewery which began production in 1857.

The Australian was built in 1856 by James Abbott in Pall Mall and subsequently he erected a theatre adjoining it. This hotel had many licensees until the Penno family began a long association with it in 1901.

The Sandhurst, a wooden frame building, was built in 1854 by John Keith, and was converted to a two-storey structure when taken over by John O'Hagen in 1869. Another early tavern was the Commercial, at the corner of Pall Mall and Bull Street, which was built in 1857 by Michael Conlon. In 1884 the name was changed to Law Courts, and several alterations were made to it in 1885.

A new house which became popular with miners was the Noah's Ark, built by Samual Ellis in 1862, six months before Henry Bockelmann established the European, which later traded under the house sign Hamburg. The original was razed in 1870 and the present building erected.

When Frederick Kraemar became licensee of the Sydenham at American Gully in the 'eighties and planned attractive features for its surrounds, Bendigo did not have only the biggest hotel outside the metropolitan area, the Shamrock, but it could boast the finest beer gardens in the colony.

The layout of the premises was unusual. There were two brick houses of six rooms, two wooden cottages of seven rooms, and two commodious bars. Twelve acres of grounds surrounded the buildings where seven hundred fruit trees were planted. The pleasure gardens were tastefully laid out with flower beds, among which were eleven discreet arbors, serviced by attentive waiters. Here in sylvan surroundings the Bendigonian of long ago enjoyed many pleasant hours.

However, similar to Ballarat, hotel business in Bendigo began to fall off when gold became scarce for manual seekers and became available in payable quantities only to mining companies which were formed to drive underground. With the departure of thousands of miners from the field, scores of licensed houses closed their doors before the end of the century, and two erstwhile towns of golden promise became centres of rural communities.

Chapter 8
PERSONALITIES OF OLD MELBOURNE TOWN

Extolling the English inn two hundred years ago, Dr. Samuel Johnson, the eminent lexicographer, wrote: "When the first road thrust into the unknown, the inn followed to succor the weary traveller along the highway". And so it was in Australia in its early years, for the new settlers were predominantly English, and the tavern or inn was close to their hearts.

Melbourne's innkeepers were an extraordinary band of men who were both imaginative and enterprising and four leaders in the young town who had these attributes to a degree were John Pascoe Fawkner, John Smith, Henry Baker and William Liardet, all of whom were innkeepers.

Despite the claims of admirers of the erstwhile van Demonian John Batman that he founded Melbourne in 1834, when he sailed up the Yarra and "conned" the aborigines into giving him the site of the village-to-be on its banks, the honour could be shared among the four innkeepers mentioned, for their firethought and enterprise raised a struggling village to a prosperous town, which was to become a great metropolis.

Perhaps Fawkner could truly claim to be the town's founder for his enterprise and forceful presentation of Melbourne's requirements to the Sydney-based rulers of the colony bore much fruit for the infant town feeling its way. And he was industrious. He built the first tavern and store and cultivated the first farm at what is now South Melbourne. He sponsored the first Market Commission and he led the laymen responsible for the building of the first Independent Church, after its services had been held in his tavern for six years. He produced the town's first newspaper, and was the first elected as a member of the N.S.W. Legislative Council for the Port Phillip district.

Perhaps his public duties showed more concern for the public than his conduct of his tavern did for his customers, if "Garryowen" is to be believed: "Fawkner's first tavern was for a time largely patronised for that very best of reasons that there was no other place to go to, for he was then the sole monopolist of grog in the country. Here he established a queer kind of 'table hotty' over which he invariably presided, and in distributing the viands he was peremptory. One had to take what was given, fat or lean, over or underdone, the whimsical taste of the carver being alone consulted. No parlaying was permitted; there was no appeal".

On New Year's Day, 1838, he published from his second house the Advertiser, hand written, which he introduced thus: "We do opine that Melbourne cannot remain longer on the chart of advancing civilisation without its Advertiser. Such being our Imperial Fiat we do intend therefore by means of this our good Advertiser to throw the resplendent light of Publicity upon the affairs of this New Colony, whether of Commerce, of Agriculture or the Arts and Mysteries of the Grazier".

"However", reported "Garryowen", "the resplendent light was not thrown on the town's affairs for very long, for it ceased publication in the following year, when his more ambitious paper, the Port Phillip Patriot, took its place". In 1840 Fawcner launched the Advertiser in Geelong, and selected an engineer, William Harrison, to edit it. While there Harrison finalised an idea for refrigerated cargo on ships, and thus the export of meat overseas became practicable.

In 1842 Fawcner was elected to the first Melbourne Corporation and, when in 1851 the first election for the Legislative Council of New South Wales was held, he won a seat which he held with great vigour until his death in 1869.

It is a sad fact that a pioneer of John Pascoe Fawcner's standing in the community should be remembered only by a crematorium, a cemetery and a park named for him.

Seven years after Fawcner had built his first "hotel" and store, one of the town's most prominent and enterprising citizens, John Smith, built St. John's Tavern on what is now the south west corner of Queen Street and Little Bourke Street. A sturdy, slab-sided bush chimneyed house, St. John's, a decade later, saw the start of the gold rush, when coaches, waggons and vehicles promiscuous left its yard for the "diggings", and many of the gold seekers were grub-staked by its proprietor.

A Londoner with some education, rare in those days, Smith shared with Fawcner leadership in the town, being its first merchant with a finger in many commercial pies. With Fawcner he was a founder of the Town Council, of which he was mayor seven times; he built and taught in the first school, conducted the first Sunday School and was the town's first freemason.

A few profitable years after he built the tavern, Smith erected the Queen's Theatre at the rear of the house and, to celebrate the opening, he arranged a benefit concert for the St. Patrick's Society. It seemed a strange gesture by Melbourne's first Freemason, but Mr. Smith was a shrewd publican who knew well how to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds. The theatre was draped in green, sixty-five pounds were taken for the sons of Ireland, and very much more was taken across the bar. And from this generous gesture came the beginning of Melbourne's first serious riot, an account of which appears in Chapter eleven.

Another of Melbourne's citizens who could claim to be an active leader in the commerce was Henry Baker, an amiable boniface. Although he was not so active in political affairs of Melbourne as were Fawcner and Smith, Baker conducted the best public house offering accommodation and meals - the Imperial, in Collins Street, which he advertised widely with cheap meals and poetic effusions.

There is little doubt that Henry was the earliest supporter of women's lib in Melbourne. He opened a "ladies parlour" when women visiting public houses were looked upon as strumpets or worse. But Henry's ideas paid off, particularly as each woman customer was greeted personally by the gallant host and presented with a flower in season.

Henry Baker was a friend of "Garryowen", who wrote of him: "Henry was an amiable boniface who, in our day of mutton-chop whiskers or beards presented a clean-shaven beaming countenance, and wore a full-length white gown to the ankles". Henry proclaimed "hearty English fare at our tables, - a substantial breakfast for one shilling; a fine dinner for one shilling and a comfortable tea or supper for one shilling. No books kept, no orders taken. N.B. - 50% increase on these charges to those individuals who practise teetotalism. Try our very superior Wines and Spirits". Apparently members of the Band of Hope would not be welcomed at Henry's Imperial!

Henry fancied himself as a poet, but he was not above using others' verses. A large sign displayed in the main bar read:

Water, water, I admire,
It wets the flowers, quenches fire;
It dampens clothes and lays the dust,
Covers fish and moistens crusts;
Since water does its share of work,
We'll drink beer so it won't shirk.

In 1845, after making some extensions to the Imperial the amiable hotelkeeper announced: "For the Benefit of the Working Classes, Singular and Unparalleled Henry Baker, having completed new brewing arrangements, is prepared to offer an article unequalled in Melbourne. Customers bringing their own jugs are supplied with wholesome Table Ale at four pence per quart. N.B. - Tobacco water and liquor derived from stewed sugar bags are prohibited. What a choice drop the latter concoction would have been for the unfortunate customers of those days!

Henry left the Imperial in 1849 and went bush to become the first of Victoria's decentralists. At Heidelberg he built the Old England Inn and, in response to his shrewd advertising:

"Spend wondrous nights 'mid sylvan delights"

his new hostelry became a honeymooners' paradise for many years, which greatly enlarged the fortunes of the likeable boniface from Collins Street.

Chapter 9
TOP POLICEMEN BECAME TAVERN KEEPERS

Many of the tavern keepers in early Victoria, particularly in Melbourne, had previously been associated with the young colony's police force from which they had resigned to become popular bonifaces. Among them were four who held the highest rank as Chief Constable of the Port Phillip district, but subsequently their interests were varied.

The first of them, Christian de Villiers was appointed in 1837, by Captain Lonsdale, Superintendent of the native police corps at a stipend of one hundred pounds per annum, and fifteen aborigines were enrolled and stationed at Narre Narre Warren. Twelve months later de Villiers resigned, but was re-appointed in 1839.

Whether the blackfellows were too hard to train is not known, but six months afterwards de Villiers again resigned to seek a publican's licence, which was granted to him for the Traveller's Rest tavern, situated on an early route to Gippsland, which started at Brighton and passed through the northern end of what is now Cheltenham. The district was known as No Good Damper, which got its name in an unusual manner.

On one of his frequent visits to Melbourne de Villiers left the tavern in charge of his handyman, who was more interested in having "a few on the house" than in looking after the place. As a result, on his return de Villiers found two of his aboriginal servants rolling on the floor, crying: "No good damper". It appeared that they had broken into the tavern store and, finding a bag of lime, they thought it was flour. Mixing some up as was done with damper they began to have a party, which soon became painful and accounted for their anguished cries. In jest the tavern keeper called the district No Good Damper, and the name stuck.

de Villiers set the Traveller's Rest up as an excellent house but travellers on the winding, ill-defined track in those days were few and far between and the poor patronage hastened his insolvency, after which the licence was ended.

One of the most unusual men to come to Melbourne was William Wright, known as "Tulip", because of his huge red nose. Born in Lancashire, he had served as a Hobart policeman before coming across Bass Strait, and soon after his arrival he was appointed Chief Constable in August, 1838. However, he resigned his position three years later and was granted a licence for the British Hotel in William Street.

"The 'Tulip' was a huge man", wrote "Garryowen", "and he was very well liked by everyone except Fawkner, who, apparently, liked no one except himself. It was amusing to see Fawkner, at least a foot shorter than the 'Tulip', laying down the law to the big man, and prodding him with a stiffened forefinger somewhere in the region of the navel".

Wright left the British in 1843 and went to Bulla where he built a house which was called the Settler's when licensed in 1844. Here he remained until 1850 when he leased the place, later called the Bridge Inn, to Patrick Donohue, and went to Five Mile Creek, now North Essendon, where he opened the Lincolnshire. After twelve months there he returned to Bulla and built the Gold Diggers' Retreat and set up in opposition to his tenant, Donohue.

However, he found that the popular local was too well-ensconced and he soon left after selling his properties in Bulla, and retired to Sunbury. Here he built a lavish hotel which he called the Sir John Franklin, after the ill-fated explorer who, when Governor of Tasmania, thought very highly of Wright and had invited him to accompany him and Lady Franklin on a hazardous overland trip to Sydney before the road had been surveyed.

The "Tulip" enjoyed the comforts of his splendid hotel in the bush only a few years before his death in 1860.

George Vinge was Superintendent of Police when he resigned to take over the Golden Fleece in Bourke Street in 1842, which had been first licensed to William Sidebottom in 1840, and, like Henry Baker, he didn't miss a trick where advertising was concerned. The Port Phillip Gazette, a month after he took over the licence reported: "Mr. George Vinge, of the Golden Fleece Hotel, Bourke Street, has forwarded to us, free gratis, a sample of new ale brewed by him. It is of a light pale colour, and has a pleasant bitter taste pleasing to the palate".

Soon he surrendered the Golden Fleece licence and went bush to take over that of the Somerton Hotel and later the Kilmore Hotel, from where he was quick to note the steady growth of traffic on the "new" Sydney road. As a result, he became one of the pioneers of coaching when the road was only a track.

Possibly to keep a closer eye on his coaching investment, Vinge retained his Kilmore licence in a house which had been the centre of controversy between the builder and the local authorities for some time. In the rush of building, the contractor had made a mistake in the alignment of the tavern, the front wall of which encroached on the main road. The authorities' insistence that the obstruction be removed was complied with twenty years afterwards!

Such was the popularity of the coaching run from Melbourne to Beechworth, that Vinge became interested in other business pursuits in Melbourne. In 1850 he sold the Kilmore house and retired to Melbourne to superintend his numerous interests there. He died in 1872.

When Allotment 18, Block 11, which is now the south east corner of Bourke and Swanston Streets, was sold at Melbourne's second land sale in 1838, it was to become the site of one of the town's famous hotels - the Royal Mail. Ten years after the land sale, the purchaser, Thomas Butler, built a fine house there which was leased to one of the town's leading citizens, William Sugden, who had resigned as Chief Constable under Governor Latrobe to take over the new public-house in the same year.

Like George Vinge, Sugden had a finger in many business pies, but he also acted officially on many public occasions, such as the opening of the new Princes Bridge, for which he made all the arrangements. When highway robbery became rampant on the goldfields roads, it was his idea to build cells at coach terminals, such as Mac's tavern, where malefactors could be held until trial could be arranged. His opinions on police matters were often sought by the authorities.

Sugden was licensee of the Royal Mail for some years before becoming the town's first business agent for which there was much scope when the population rose rapidly to more than three hundred thousand in the late 'fifties as a result of the goldrush. The erstwhile Chief Constable continued this prosperous business until his retirement in the early 'seventies.

Chapter 10
WHEN THE ORANGE MET THE GREEN

The opening of John Smith's Queen's Theatre in the 'forties was a great social event for the Irish but, as the event took place close to Ulster's great day, the 12th of July, all of Melbourne's Orangemen and their multitude of friends decided to have an occasion also. They proposed to have a procession to celebrate the Battle of the Boyne but it was called off and, instead, they had a dinner at the Pastoral Inn across Queen Street from St. John's. Huge orange banners and flags hung from the Pastoral windows, a challenge which brought a great crowd of the green Irish around the door of the Orange stronghold. The uproar was great when the mayor, who had been hurriedly summoned, arrived and ordered that the offending bunting be removed. This was done but there was no change in the behaviour of the irate mob in the street, which portended much trouble.

At this moment "Garryowen" arrived and in this manner described the scene: "The whole thoroughfare from Bourke to Lonsdale Street was thronged by a swaying, angry determined multitude ready, like so many frenzied bears, to rush the Pastoral from the windows of which popped out the heads of a score of Orangemen, some of whom menacingly displayed the muzzles of firearms. The withdrawn banners were again brought to the windows and hailed with deafening roars of execration.

"On the uproar easing, the mayor from the street, in a loud authoritative voice, demanded the surrender of the obnoxious ensigns, which was indignantly refused, whereupon his Worship and several magistrates with him, to compel obedience, proceeded up the stairs. At the top they were confronted by an advance guard of the Orangemen and the landlord, who doggedly impeded their further advance.

"Simultaneously with this check a volley was fired from the windows into the street, at the opposite side of which Father Geoghan and Mr. John O'Shannassy were in conversation, and the priest was grazed by a ball which took the shoulder of David Hurley, who was standing behind him. Across the way at St. John's Tavern Thos O'Brien was taking a glass with Mrs. John Smith when the Pastoral firearms swung towards them. Thos, contemptuous of Orange guns, raised his glass to his lips and a bullet smashed it and his teeth, and lodged at the root of his tongue, until he gave a great gulp and swallowed it. (What a great imagination the scribe had!).

"By 4 p.m. the police and military were concentrated on the battlefield. The Pastoral was forced, the house was cleared and the Orangemen were removed by the police to the watch house. But the situation was tense all night, during which Orange headquarters were removed to the Bird in Hand, in Flinders Lane, kept by a zealot named Ewan Toleme. By mid-morning, however, it had been surrounded and invested by the Governor, Mr. Latrobe, the mayor and his justices, the police and the military. The Riot Act was read and police seized the tavern. They may have preferred the birds in the bush in Queen Street, where the Green Irish were assembling for what they described as self-defence.

"Authority closed the shops and the taverns, and the Governor and the mayor and all their warriors paraded. Coming on the assemblage of Greens, they read the Riot Act again and made speeches. Perhaps they had a way with crowds for this one gave three cheers for the Queen, three for the Governor and three more for the mayor. Then it went off in comparative quiet, although several people who were carrying weapons more formidable than hurley-sticks wound up in the watch house". Subsequent court evidence showed that the great majority of those arrested were Orangemen and that only two of the arresting policemen were not from the south of Ireland!

This was the first of some very lively happenings in old Melbourne and the consequences could have been serious but for the quick response of the authorities. To celebrate it a local Shakespeare broke into verse thus:

And blood flowed like water until it was done.
Which continued right late 'til the set of the sun,
When the troopers rode up and arrested 'tis said,
Pat O'Brien for breaking an Orangeman's head.
And the Southerners milled round the Pastoral door,
'Til the policemen arrived to exercise law;
Then all of us retired from carnage and sin,
To refresh with an ale at old St. John's inn.

The subsequent histories of the Pastoral and St. John's Tavern were very different. The former tavern was de-licensed in the 1870's and its site is now an office building. But the latter lasted until about ten years ago when, as the Beaufort hotel, it was demolished. In between it had had two names - the Sabloniere in 1857 and the Carpentaria in 1865. It was named the Beaufort in 1874.