MILDURA AT THE TIME OF THE BLANDOWSKI EXPEDITION

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I WOULD LIKE TO THANK the organizers of the Blandowski symposium for the invitation extended to the Mildura and District Historical Society to be represented here and to give some insight into what was happening in nearby Mildura when the Blandowski Expedition was taking place.

Regrettably all too little is known of the original inhabitants of this district. We know the regions occupied by some groups such as the Latji Latji, Nintait, Barkinji and so on, though of course the spelling can never be relied on. Some people are currently working on discovering more about them, but I am not able to provide you with such information and must move on to the first known white person to pass through this area, and that is the famous Charles Sturt (1795- 1869). Early in 1830, he travelled down the Murrumbidgee to its junction with the Murray, and then down to the Murray itself. Sturt had no way of knowing that this river was the one that had been discovered six years earlier and named the Hume by Hume and Hovell, who had trekked from Gunning, near Canberra, to Corio Bay, Port Phillip, Victoria, in 1824-25.[1] When Sturt reached the Darling on 23 January 1839, he had a clearer idea of where he was, and named this river the Murray River after Sir George Murray, the Secretary who ran the Colonial Office back in London. Thus the river was both the Hume and the Murray until it was realised they were the proverbial one and the same. Which name? As always the politician won out. It is interesting that at many points in Mildura's history there is an indecision, an uncertainty of which of the two is right, or should be adopted.

Sturt's double volume (1834) is the work he wrote of his travels based on his diaries and published only a couple of years later. It is part of the Historical Society's excellent collection.

> After breakfast, we proceeded onwards as usual. The river had increased so much in width that, the wind being fair, I hoisted sail for the first time, to save the strength of my men as much as possible. Our progress was consequently rapid. We passed through country that, from the nature of its soil and other circumstances, appeared to be intersected by creeks and lagoons. Vast flights of waterfowl passed over us, but always at a considerable elevation, while on the other hand, the paucity of ducks on the river excited our surprise. We were again roused to action by the boat suddenly striking upon a shoal, which reached from one side of the river to the other. To jump out and push her into deeper water was but the work of a moment with the men, and it was just as she floated again that our attention was withdrawn to a new and beautiful stream, coming apparently from the north (Sturt 1834).

As far as is known, the next white visitor was Major Thomas Mitchell (1792-1855) in 1835-36. On 3 January 1836, he buried a bottle by a tree right at the junction of the Murray and the Darling and carved the words 'Dig Under' on the tree. Hawdon and Bonney[2] drove their cattle from Melbourne to Adelaide, and chose to travel adjacent to the Murray for the sake of their stock. They passed Mildura in February 1838, and on 1 March, they found Mitchell's bottle, two years after it had been buried. Hawdon and Bonney continued their journey, reaching Adelaide in April, meanwhile naming Lake Victoria – after a brand new queen – and Lake Bonney on the way. So far every white person who had passed through here had done just that.

We know of no attempts to settle here before 1847. A few years ago we celebrated the 150th anniversary of Frank Jenkins swimming his 900 cattle across the Murray with the intention of being the first to settle here. He got it wrong. He had been travelling westward for many miles and thought that by now he must be in South Australia, so he went to Adelaide to get permission to establish a cattle station here. It's easy for us. When we drive to Adelaide signposts tell us we are now leaving Victoria, the surface of the road improves, and someone asks us if we

have any fruit. But how do you recognise a border when there are none of those things? In fact, how do you establish a border? The Surveyor-General for the colony of South Australia had fixed the meridian for the border between South Australia and Victoria at about this time. It is named after him and called Wade's Line. Well, Jenkins had not reached it. When he enquired in Adelaide, he was told he had been in Victoria and that now he would have to go to Melbourne to establish the right to settle. Meanwhile, the Jamiesons with their sheep had beaten him to it and purchased the land, initially in the name of Sir William Stawell, the noted solicitor and politician. Now Frank Jenkins had no option but to swim his cattle back across the Murray and set up in New South Wales at Gol Gol. More confusion. This Gol Gol is not quite the same as the Gol Gol[3] some of you may have passed through on your way here, but is a large station a little further north. Don't worry. There is more to come. There are two Irymples: one along 15th Street and another near the southern end of Deakin Avenue. There are two ways of spelling Red Cliffs: as two words, as on the Post Office, and as one, as on the Railway Station. Sandalong Avenue is often spelt as Sandilong Avenue. There are two places called White Cliffs, and one is now called Merbein, which some people think should be Merebin.

The property taken up by the Jamieson brothers was originally known as Yerre Yerre, but the Jamiesons, Hugh and Busby, wished to call it Mildura. In 1858, the name Mildura became official, so the Jamiesons now lived at the Mildura Station Homestead. What does Mildura mean? You guessed it. There are two possibilities. It could mean Red Rock or Red Earth or Red Dust. Or it could mean what that Red Dust causes: Sore Eyes. The local civic authorities are quite certain it means Red Rock. They do not want to have a name that means Eyesore. An important historical source is Bride (1983 [1898]) entitled *Letters from Victorian Pioneers*, and it includes one letter from Hugh Jamieson, written from Mildura Station on 10 October, 1853. I won't quote it here. It argues that, in spite of what you might think, the Aborigines were of assistance in running the station.

In 1852, the first church service was held in the district when the Rev. J. D. Mereweather conducted a service at Mildura Station for the Church of England. Then, on behalf of the Church of England, the Rev. Thomas Goodwin founded the Yelta Mission in August 1855. Some photographs exist of his work especially among the Aboriginal children. What is particularly interesting from a historical point of view, especially in the light of what was to come later, is that he introduced the first irrigation attempt in the district. Water pumped up the hill from the river to a garden provided the mission with vegetables, fruit and flowers. All-in-all the mission was not otherwise a great success and it ceased after a few years. In 1857, Dr Blandowski came to what we know now as Chaffey Landing in Merbein for the project whose anniversary we are currently celebrating.

Do you remember being young? One of the great entertainments of yesteryear was a little device known as a stereoscope. Photography was fairly new when the stereoscope was invented. By taking two photographs simultaneously from lenses a few centimetres apart, printing them side by side on a card and placing the card in the stereoscope, the picture appeared to have a three-dimensional quality. They were popular for a century, though various names were given to it, the most famous, perhaps, being Viewmaster. They can still be found if you look. And if you can recall more of your childhood, many of you will remember one or two or three volumes named Cole's Funny Picture Book. The Cole was E.W. Cole who had a famous bookshop in Melbourne, Cole's Book Arcade. In 1862, Cole and his friend George Burnell, passed along the Murray taking photographs for stereoscopes. Many of their photographs still exist and are preserved in the Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide. While in this district they stayed with the Jamiesons. They are marvellous photographs and provide us with visual images for many locations which are not otherwise available to us.

The Historical Society is fortunate in that one of our keenest members in the 1960's and 1970's was our then local member of the Legislative Council, a man named Arthur Mansell. During some of his spare hours at Spring Street, he would spend time in the Parliamentary Library and acquired photocopies of many significant documents relating to the early years of Mildura. He presented them to us in this suitcase with his name on the outside. You can imagine how much information has been thus made readily available to us. Here, for example, is a whole volume on the Yerre Yerre Run, another on Irymple, and more than a dozen others besides. In time, the Jamiesons sold out. Future owners of Mildura Station, including A. McEdward, after whom the famous Ridge Road is more correctly named, had none of the successes of the first purchasers. Long years of

drought would have been enough but thanks to the carelessness, or ignorance, of a Hunt Club in Geelong, the rabbit was introduced to Australia where it had few natural enemies, and so they bred like rabbits. The rabbit plague destroyed any hope of the station being a success until the situation could be halted. In an attempt to populate the Mallee, the Victorian Colonial Government introduced the Mallee Pastoral Leases Act in late 1883. It had limited success because of the difficulty of getting water to where it was needed, so it was that one of the greatest politicians in Australia's history, Alfred Deakin, who at the time, was, among other things, the minister for Water Supply, established a Royal Commission to investigate the possibility of large-scale irrigation here. As part of that Commission a team visited the United States, and it was from that that the Chaffey brothers came to establish an extraordinary new era into the history of Mildura, but that, needless to say, is not pertinent to our study today.

Much of the materials covered here can be found in Kenyon (1914), and see also Hill (1946), and Lapthorne (1946) for more detailed histories of Mildura.

NOTES

1. Hamilton Hume (1797-1872) and William Hilton Hovell (1786-1875), see Hume (1966).
2. Joseph Hawdon (1813 to 1871) and Charles Bonney (1813 to 1897), see Gibbney (1969).
3. Hope and Hercus (this volume) note 'Krefft gives 'koel' or 'kohl' for the greater stick-nest rat, and so Gol Gol must have been known for the presence of stick-nest rats, or for a myth connected with them'.
4. C.f., Nyeri Nyeri, the name of the Aboriginal tribe inhabiting both sides of the Murray River in the vicinity of Mildura (see Grist, and Hope & Hercus, this volume). Blandowski (1857) provides a number of variations for the name of this tribe including Yarree Yarree.

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