

## A PIONEER'S STORY

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‘A pioneer who witnessed almost the beginning of Victorian settlement is Mrs. Louisa Humphries [nee Arpin], of Bolinda, near Romsey who is probably the oldest woman in Victoria. She was born in London in 1813 and is still active ... has a wonderful memory, and a fund of anecdote about early Melbourne, which was a little bush village just two years old when she first knew it.

I came out to Van Dieman's Land," ... in 1832, in the Princess Royal, the first emigrant ship which arrived there. There had been frequent requests for free domestic servants, and our ship brought out nearly a couple of hundred girls. We had been promised positions at 8s. to 10s. per week, which was regarded as good wages in those days. We soon found that there were too many of us, and it was extremely difficult to get good places.

A year after I arrived I married, and we went to live at Launceston where my husband worked occasionally for John Pascoe Fawkner, who was a neighbour. When Fawkner came over to Port Phillip, in 1835, he wanted my husband to engage with him, but I objected to his going to such a wild country. After Batman and Fawkner settled at Port Phillip, all the talk in Launceston was of the new country, and, work being slack, my husband, who was an expert brickmaker, engaged with Fawkner, and left about the middle of 1837, promising to send for me in a month. But the schooner was five or six weeks beating about the Straits before they were able to enter the heads. I was sent for at last, and arrived in the Yarra in the Enterprise (Fawkner's schooner) on September 14, 1837. Mr. Wedge, I remember, brought over four horses in the schooner, and there were two other passengers, brothers, named Birch. It was on a Saturday evening when the Enterprise was tied up to a tree on the river bank, and Mr. Humphries took me and our two children through the bush to a little wattle and daub hut, which stood in what is now Little Collins-street, between Elizabeth and Swanston streets. My husband and a mate were brickmaking close by.

On Sunday morning Mr. Humphries had to go up to Batman's Hill to Fawkner's for rations, and I was scared by the arrival of a number of blacks, who begged 'white lubra giv' it bread. We lived in that hut from September, 1837, to July, 1839, when we moved out to what was then called Batman's Swamp, where the Spencer-street railway yards now are.

"Melbourne during that period was a scattered village in the bush, without streets, and with few houses, mostly huts. Henry Batman (John Batman's brother) was chief constable, and Buckley, was also a policeman, and a dull, stupid fellow he was. Where Elizabeth-street is now was a gully, through which a creek, often dry, but sometimes quite a torrent, ran. The first schoolhouse was erected where St. James's Church now stands. Miss Osborne was the first teacher, and after her Mrs. Dutton. It was built of sawn timber, cut in a saw-pit in what

is now Elizabeth-street. I well remember John Batman's funeral in 1839. He was buried in what is now the old cemetery, adjoining the Victoria Market. Then it was neither cleared nor fenced—but a few graves in the bush. Poor John Batman was an invalid for some time before his death, and used to be wheeled about in a chair. He left a family of eight daughters and a young son, who was afterwards drowned in the Yarra. His brother Henry died in October of the same year (1839).

The first watch-house, the gaol, such as it was, and the stocks were somewhere near where the Western Market now is. The gaol was a tea-tree shanty, which was burned down by some blacks who were imprisoned for stealing potatoes from a settler named Langhorne. The natives, who escaped, told how they fired it by rubbing two sticks together. The policemen used to call the hours during the night-watch, and it was a standing joke afterwards, to call out to them, '2-o'clock, and all's well, and the gaol's burnt.'

After moving out to Batman's Swamp, like many of the other neighbours, we kept a couple of cows, and I was summoned to court one day for allowing them to wander through the streets of the village. The courthouse—the only one I was ever in as an offender—was a little wooden shanty, with a few rough boards laid on the ground for a floor. Mr. James Simpson was the magistrate. He asked me if I stood in my husband's shoes. I told him I stood in my own, and with a laugh he fined me £1. He was known to everybody as 'Jimmy' Simpson, and was very popular. Another well-known citizen was John McNall, who built the first butcher's shop in the settlement, in Collins-street, near the corner of Swanston-street.

George Scarborough, quite a character, was the first pound-keeper, and the first pound was near the river bank, between Swanston and Russell streets. We went to the first races held at Flemington in 1840, in Scarborough's bullock-dray. Coming home Scarborough was three sheets in the wind, and we came down Batman's Hill, through Collins-street, at racing pace. Mrs. Scarborough and I, who were sitting on the bottom of the dray, being nearly tipped out when the bullocks rounded into Elizabeth-street.'

Referring to the early race meetings, Edmund Finn, in *Chronicles of Early Melbourne*, says the first race meeting was held on March 6 and 7, 1838, on a racecourse on Batman's Hill: the starting-post was where the North Melbourne railway station now is, and the grandstand—a couple of bullock drays lashed together—was on the site now occupied by the Spencer-street station. The jumps for the Hunters' Plate were made of logs and gum branches, and the jockeys (gentlemen riders) rode in red or blue flannel shirts, cabbage-tree hats, and leather leggings. In 1839 the second race meeting was held on this course, but the following year it was moved to Flemington. John McNall, to whom Mrs. Humphries refers, was clerk of course in 1839.

'In November or December, 1849 a great flood occurred, and all Batman's Swamp was under water. Our house was flooded, and the children and I were taken off in a boat. My husband's brickyards were destroyed, and we did not go back to live at the swamp, but moved out to

Flemington, where we had a couple of acres of land."

Provisions were often scarce and dear in the early days of Melbourne. The settlement had to depend on Launceston and Sydney for its flour, and often bad weather would delay the trading schooners, and leave the place very short of food. Sometimes bread ran up to 1s. to 3s. a loaf.

When the diggings broke out, Mr. Humphries, like most of the men folk, went off to make his fortune, but he was not very successful, and in 1858 he came up here (Bolinda), and obtained this farm (200 acres), and here I have resided for over 46 years. Twenty-two years ago, I lost my husband, and last year my oldest son, who was over 70, died. I have seven children still living, 45 grandchildren, two of whom are living with me, and nearly as many great-grandchildren. My memory has always been good. I can remember going, as a little girl, with my mother to St. John's Church, Bedford-road, London, to hear the funeral service for George the Third in 1820. I was with her in the streets to witness the celebrations at the crowning of George the Fourth, and can distinctly recollect the public sympathy for Queen Caroline, whom he would not allow to be crowned. In 1830 I saw the celebrations when William the Fourth came to the throne. Just 67½ years ago I landed in Melbourne. It is nine years since I saw it last, but I hope to see it once again.'

Louisa died at her daughter's residence near Riddell on 11 June 1912, aged 98.

Photo: Wikitree

**Contributed by Valerie Farley PPPG member # 551**