

4.0 Sam at New Norfolk...Launceston...Portland... Melbourne settlement

4.1 A Van Diemans Land shepherd...more sheep and the reason.

"Stand still all of you and don't do anything threatening to us!" said the big wild looking man, waving his gun over all my family.

The three men, on horseback, had erupted suddenly from the trees and bushes onto the road. They looked absolutely scary and villainous. Hats pulled down low, kerchiefs covering their mouths and nose, and carrying muskets.

Bushrangers!!

The sheep scattered everywhere, with lots of baahing. The dogs started to bark in confusion, and run everywhere. Dad was shouting something to me. I was shouting at Blackie my dog.

The goats started bleating, and the chooks began sqwaking. The normally placid oxen looked like getting upset.

Anyway this was serious.

The murderous threatening gestures of the riders looked awful. One rode up to Dad and laid his horse very close to him, as if he would get his horse to run over him, if he didn't co operate.

" Keep those dogs under control." Shouted the leader, whose horse was doing it best to unseat him by rearing and prancing, even with the reins pulling the bit fiercely in its mouth. He was very close to the cart with Mum and Louise. The other ratbag charged down the road and pulled up very close to me looking dangerous..

"All right we won't do anything silly," my father shouted out, looking desperately at my mother and sister on the ox cart and at myself with one of the sheep dog's at the back of the flock.

"Bitza c'mon here. Sit! Sit!" Bitza looked like he wanted a fight, head down low, with backside and tail stuck high in the air, growling and slobbering out loud at the riders.

I will never forget that scene. We were travelling along the well used road from Hobart to Launceston. Actually the road was more like a wide track, not like the well maintained road from New Norfolk to Hobart. When other travelers, walking or if very lucky in owning a horse, on the road wished to pass us, we had to get our cart and sheep over to the left hand side, because that was a law made by Governor Macquarie, instructing everyone how to use a busy road.

At night time we also had to get our cart and sheep off the track.. Settling down for the night was quite a tiring job.



An early Tamar River view.

My Dad had arranged for us to be shepherds at a Mr. Archibald Thomsen's property five miles from Launceston. Mr. Thomsen owned 2000

acres, and had servants and assigned convicts to help run the property. We had a small flock of our sheep about 30 ewes, one ram, and a dozen lambs. They were left over after selling the others, and our small holding, to get money. Mr. Thomsen was going to purchase the sheep to add to his stock.

Helping us were our two sheep dogs, Bitza an older dog very used to controlling sheep, and Blackie, my small young dog who I was training.

Mum was sitting in a small cart, with my older sister Louise. The cart was pulled by two oxen we had to buy. It contained all our possessions that we needed for our new life. Clothes, sleeping gear, cooking utensils, food, animal fodder, and including chooks that were in cages. Two milking goats were tied to the back, and trailed behind.

The sheep were normally spread out over about one hundred yards. Dad was close to the front with Bitza trying to push them along, and I was at the back with Blackie, trying to push the stragglers along . I was teaching him by waving my arms in a forward motion and he was supposed to nip them on their heels. The cart with mum and my sister was about half way along the sheep.

"Wher ya goin. What ya got?' sang out the leader.

Mum and Louise just sat holding each other very tight, very scared.

"Nothing much. We are on our way to work for Mr. Archibald Thomsen."

"Hurry up Fred! We are a bit too close to Launceston for my liking." The man close to Dad shouted, " Don't forget the troopers ride up and down this road. Our horses are a bit tired and can't run too far."

"All right then. You Mister! give us a couple of blankets, that bag of spuds on the cart, and three sheep to eat."

I didn't like it, but Dad told me to get three sheep, and hand them over. Anyway I fooled them, I quickly used my crook and grabbed them one at a time. All old and tough. One with a crook leg, one that was a bit sick and one that was always giving us trouble. They leaned out of their saddle and swung their musket butts and stunned the sheep. I tried not to look into their horrible eyes as I had to hold the ewes up a bit so they could reach down and swing them up to lay across their saddles.

I was pretty sure that the one threatening me was a native. How could that be! After 4 shepherds working for the Van Diemens Land Pastoral Company at Cape Grim found that natives had killed a lot a lot of sheep by driving them over a cliff, they killed about 30 of them. Since then the natives caused a lot of trouble to the settlers and land owners. In 1828 finally Lt. Governor Arthur, banned all natives from white man settled areas.

Finally in 1830 he mustered about five thousand men, to carry out what was called The Black Line. It was for men to spread out and drive all the natives from the south east settled areas of Van Diemens Land all the way up north to the Bass Strait Island. Only two natives were captured. They say it cost a lot of money for no effect. But the natives did make themselves scarce, and hard to find.

"Let's go!" With that they whirled around and quickly galloped of up the road, round the corner out of site, without saying another word.

Gee they looked mean and ugly!.But they were lucky I didn't have a loaded musket.

Later that evening, Dad and I were sitting very close to the embers of our cooking fire. Mum and Louise were in bed, lying on the floor of the small wagon, covered by a small canvass shelter. The ram was tied to a tree, and

two of the ewes had copper bells tied around their necks, so we could find them if they moved too far from the campsite.



Guess what?

We were all upset and nervous about the raid by the bushrangers. Dad was doing his best to reassure us everything was alright. He even had his old musket propped up to the wagon.

When we left New Norfolk, Dad reckoned it would take us about twenty four to thirty days to herd the sheep to Mr. Thomsen's place called Cormiston, about five miles from Launceston on the Tamar River. He thought we had about fifteen miles to go. We had heard that some one was looking at starting up a Stage Coach line with lots of changeover horses, like the one from Hobart to New Norfolk. But with the state of the road, even horse drawn carts had trouble using it.

Over the fire every night, he retold us little bits about his early life, and why he made the decision to sell up and leave for Launceston.

Dad was born on Norfolk Island. His parents were free settlers, who left England and went to the colony of Sydney. His family being farmers were encouraged, with other families, to go and make a farm on Norfolk Island.

They would grow vegetables, and rear stock to help feed the Government officials , soldiers and convicts on the Island.

They were allocated land on the Island. Convicts to clear, till, plant the land, and build dwellings and fences. And small amounts of stock, grains and vegetables to commence with. Even though there were hard times with more and more convicts to feed and sometimes sending food to Sydney because of droughts, the family prospered.

Eventually the Government in England forced the Governor's of New South Wales, to take steps to close Norfolk Island and resettle all persons either in New South Wales or preferably Van Diemans land.

The Sydney Government offered lots of inducements' to re settle in Van Diemans land. For every acre a family had on the Island, in Van Diemans Land they would receive four acres.

The new settlers would be given stock to make up for the stock having to be left on the Island, vegetables and grain seeds. Housing and convicts to clear the land and set up a farm.

Dad reckons the Government, could not and did not live up to its promises. Some people did very well, others just survived, and others did poorly.

My Dad and Mums families, just survived. Naturally being a shepherd, anything to do with sheep or animals always interested my Dad.

"Sam, I have taught you everything I know about sheep and stock. When we get to Cormiston, its very important that you show the owner and others how much you know and can do."

"How do I do that Dad?" I asked.

"Well just remember how to handle and hold lambs. How to restrain ewes, and not to let the rams get cranky or excited. You know how to help a ewe giving birth. You know how to cut the wool, and free it of knots and ties. How to cut their feet horns, and how to kill them painlessly. The main thing is to be kind and don't threaten them."

" I can do that, but why Dad?"

"Well you know the Government employed convict postal messenger James White, who rides along this road delivering letters and other things he can carry on horseback, to farmers and officials.'

"Yes."

"He told me that a Mr. Forlonge and his family had arrived in Launceston Port, from England, with his own flock of fine wool sheep, and was going to farm them in the Launceston area. I believe that there is no opportunity any more for a small sheep breeder like myself. So as you know I left home for a week, a little while ago to travel up to Launceston to ask Mr. Folinge for a job as shepherd."

" How is it that we are going to a Cormiston and not going to work for Mr. Forlonge."

"Well that's another story. Anyway factories in England will take all the good quality wool they can get from all over the world, but would prefer to get it from British colonies, because it would be cheaper and more reliable. Now that they have stopped giving land away in New South Wales, and here in Van Diemens Land, the cost of me buying land is getting to expensive to expand to feed all the sheep we need to make a decent living. Also a lot of the cheaper priced breeds we have here are not good enough fine wool producers."

" The year you were born in 1820, a very rich influential man in New South Wales a Mr. John Macarthur, delivered merino's to Hobart Town, and sold one hundred and eighty merino fine wool sheep for seven guineas each. He sold them to Lt. Governor Sorell, so that the Government could help breed better sheep. I can't afford that amount of money."

"Gee that's a lot of money Dad, I can't even think how much it is."

"Many of the sheep we have on this Island are Hairy Bengal sheep, crossed with Cape Long Tailed sheep. Really only good enough for eating. When the merino sheep are crossed they seem to produce very good fine long wool. Mr. Forlonge brought Saxon sheep from Germany to try crossing the breeding.

" A Mr. Thomas Henty, just about the biggest and best sheep breeder in England sold the merino sheep to Mr. Macarthur. Mr. Henty had bought some of them from Farmer George. That's the King of England's nickname. The King seems to like breeding animals more than he does being King of England. Anyway the sheep are getting better here."

" So why are we going to work for Mr. Thomsen?"

"When Mr. Forlonge arrived his sister in law .and their families. It appeared that his sister in law was in charge. She had hired the brig Czar in England to bring out their families, servants and sheep. When they arrived at Launceston, she decided to take most of the sheep, servants and her large family on to Sydney to settle, and not stay in Launceston. She left Mr. Forlonge and his family with only 40 sheep in Launceston..

"Mr. Forlonge could not afford to employ me, but Mr. Thomsen, who heard about me, discussed sheep with me and decided to employ me and get rid of his convict shepherds."

" Why would he get rid of his convicts Dad?"

"Well he, like a lot of landowners are getting fed up with the system that allows convicts and others to keep one third of all lambs born as payment for looking after their flocks. The thylacine or as we call it tiger, devils and natives really don't kill or steal many sheep, so other people were getting wealthier for just looking after the sheep, being fed, and not owning land or paying Government taxes. Now if you want to be paid as a shepherd when you get older, you will have to prove to him that you can handle sheep."