

1.3 A present for Cathryn...A busy Port...A Cannon shot... and angry disputes.

.....a present for Cathryn...

Well its about 4pm and my duty up the special lookout is over. No ships have appeared and signaled for Capn. Fermaner to go aboard and pilot the ship up the channels. The lookout is a large Honeysuckle tree with steps cut up it. Jack, Capn. Fermaner's boy and I had been up and around the tree for about 8 hours.

All we had seen was lot's of smoke from fires all over the plains before the range of hills. The fires were lit to burn the heaps of trees and bushes that had been felled and gathered into big piles by settlers. I don't know what duties the Capn. had given to the other men, but Jack and I had eaten all the food Mrs. Fermaner had given us, so it was time to go.

The tree was close to the Old Port. The place used to be called Seaview. Then it was called Leith by Capn. Fermaner. Now its called Old Port, because Capn. Fermaner moved the Port to a better area. He called it Port Albert after Queen Victoria's husband.

My Mate Billy was with his tribe, so all I had to do was go to the Harbor Master Office, deliver Jack to his Mum, and mark a cross with a pencil on a chart that had a column saying 26th Dec. That meant no ships had arrived today. It also meant I would not have to go to the Customs House and tell them a ship was expected.

I looked at the chart and counted out that 49 ships had arrived this year of 1844, to deliver supplies or take on board mostly cattle, a few sheep and some small crops in bails or bags, for Launceston, Hobart, Port Arthur or Melbourne.



Getting around Wilsons Promontory.

Cathryn always looks good in her apron, and usually has a smile for me. She reads a lot and often teases me about my lack of knowledge and my accent. When she read about some special horse races with lots of money prizes to be won, at a place called Flemington, and saw me riding a stock horse mustering the cattle to go on a ship, she reckoned I ride better than most and could win a prize at Flemington.

At least she thought I would do better riding a horse than riding the camels that had arrived in Van Diemens Land 4 years ago. I have never seen a camel, but the picture Cathryn drew showed a very strange beast.

One day when my mate Billy was showing us how to get honey from some shrubs, Cathryn told us the story of Truganini. She was one of the last living aboriginal persons from Van Diemens Land and how she was nearly hanged in Melbourne for being an accomplice to some other aboriginal men and women who murdered 2 stockmen in the Bass River area, near Mr. Hugh Andersons Run. Truganini's mob, had been transported from Van Diemens Land to Flinders Island and then on to Dandenong near Melbourne.

Billy just grinned on hearing the story, but I knew he didn't like any white fella shooting and hunting his people, even though they were not from his tribe.

"Hello Cathryn," I said. I had knocked on the side door of the General Store owned by her father. " Hello Mackenzie, happy Christmas! Are you going to the gathering on the foreshore at 6 o'clock.?"

I mumbled a bit and quickly gave her the possum cloak that I had made for her.

"Its to wear when it gets windy and cold." My mate Billy had trapped the possums and shown me how to skin and cure the fur. I had then used bits of fish net twine to sew the skins together into a cloak. I hoped it didn't smell too much.

I then picked up the 3 snapper I had tied together, and said for her to give them to her Mother. Cathryn and her Mum occasionally gave me some biscuits or a pinch of real tea.

I could see her Dad in the background so I didn't get a kiss on the cheek. Oh well, next time.

.....A busy Port.....

Capn. Fermaner, had worked as a Sea Captain for the Henty family in Launceston, so he knew the importance of record keeping and swift provision of services to ships Captains. Like helping tie them up properly, provide a gig, and row the Captain to the Customs House, as well as note down the Captains requirements, so he could be helped, and charged properly.

My most important job though, was when it came time to get all the cattle to be shipped and walk then along the track, then into the barriers, then up the gang plank onto the ship. Can I swing and crack a stock whip. I sure can. I reckon I'm the best in this Port!, and most people agree.

I can flick the whip, and sting a steer on the bum from 20 feet away and drive it forward. That reminds me, I had better go and find my Chinese mate Jimmy Ah Fat. he is probably working in his Dad's market garden. I don't know why he is called Ah Fat, he is only a skinny little bloke, and his Dad isn't much bigger.

I'll say this for his Dad though, as small as he is, when a ship has arrived or getting ready to depart, and goods have to be carried across the gang plank, Jimmy's Dad always seems to be the first to get the work. He can carry a lot.

Cathryn also told me how Jimmy Ah Fat's people got here. A rich and famous Sydney man, William Charles Wetworth and several of his rich friends, wanted to import Chinese workers from Ports in Amoy in China. Those men, with their families were to work on the Runs as sheep or cattle men.

That was because the Government was cracking down on the Squatters using convict labour, and they could see a money making opportunity importing Chinese.

Jimmy's Dad, Mum and kids arrived in Melbourne and were going to be sent to the Western Districts, but instead were sent here in Gippsland.

If we go this arvo, we can get a few dozen oysters and maybe some black swan eggs. I can't trap a wallaby or koala, I would need Billy's help for that. I could give some to Mr. Campbell, that would give me an excuse to see Cathryn again.

When I arrived at Port Albert I was very surprised at the amount of people in the villages. I had only been used to small huts with bark for a roof, and timber sticks and posts daubed with mud to keep out the wind and cold. And just a few people.

Here in Port Albert there are 3 small villages close to each other. The Old Port, full of timber shacks and humpies, with pretty low class of people, including runaway convicts and drunks. At the Port, there are small shops for Baking, Shoe making, a General Store, Saddlery, and Smithy. Lots of buildings are made from bricks with lime, sand and , mortar, with proper windows and doors.

A small distance away is Palmerston, where Government buildings and people live.

A bit farther away is Tara the second oldest village.

The streets are wide and there is a back trail that the cattle and sheep arrive by to be held in the cattle yards close to the jetty.

Commissioner Tyers, who with his Native Police and Commander Dana, had conducted a srvey of the district with the intention of telling Lt. Gov. La Trobe, who in turn would tell Governor Gipps in Sydney, who could and should pay the Government money for the land they occupy. The upshot was that the Commissioner nailed up part of his report upon the door of a Government building for all to see.

REPORT TO HIS EXCELLENCY
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR LA TROBE
BY COMMISSIONER TYERS

JULY 1844

Be it known that the area called GIPPSLAND

HAS:-

TOTAL POPULATION of 445. Women 80, Children 29.

PORT ARTHUR population 120

PRODUCTIVE LAND AVAILABLE, 650,000 acres

THE 40 RUNS on this land supporting 325 people

TOTAL RUN STOCK 410 horses, 20,157 cattle, 62,445 sheep

"Hi Jimmy what's up?"

"Heya Mack!. Nothing much. Sick of this raking the furrows and pulling out weeds though. I reckon my Dad's trying to feed all of Port Albert."

" C'mon, see if your Dad will let you go oystering with me."

We had a great time, covered in mud, with bags of oysters. Sitting on a bank, slurping them down. My belly rumbled a few times though.

"Jimmy , I need your help. I've got to cut some more railings and stumps and drag them back to add to the supply in the cattle yards. Capn. Fermaner is worried that some are a bit cracked and far gone, so we won't have enough to contain the next cattle herd arrival."

I don,t know how the Squatter works out how many cattle or sheep to send, because the average ship only takes about 50 cattle or 80 sheep. Some get hurt or die and can't be shipped. Anyway thats not my problem. I have to make sure there is enough posts and rails.

"Sounds like hard yakka to me Mack, it's easier raking and weeding."

"Alright Jimmy, what can I do for you?" I wound up doing some hoing in his Dad's vegetable garden.

...A cannon shot...and angry disputes

Commissioner Tyers, a Naval Captain who had made a career in the Navy of surveying, and who until recently was Commissioner of the Portland Bay area, had arrived with Captain Dana and the detachment of 20 Mounted Native Troopers.

Being the Governments official representative as Magistrate, the lawlessness in the area had been reduced, although it still hasn't stopped squatters like Angus McMillan shooting and killing aborigines who go on their land and steal cattle or sheep. The funny thing is, that McMillan has always been friends with some aborigines and looks after them and protects them.

The day the Commissioner arrived at Port Albert was momentous. Capn. Fermaner, who probably new Commissioner Tyers from his Bass Strait, Van Diemens Land, and Portland shipping days, as Pilot and Harbour Master of Port Albert wanted to put on a big welcoming ceremony.

Captain tyers had taken about 3 months to get here, after being selected by Governor Gipps in Sydney, and being despatched by Lt. Gov. La Trobe from Melbourne. The various roads he took proved to be impassable, so he had to arrive by ship.

Capn. Fermaner made all sorts of arrangements so that when the ship was making its way up the estuary, he would alert everyone.The Commissioner could then meet the local leaders, business men, inspect the Port, then take up residence, and quarter his Native Police Force.

Capn. Fermaner even had me and Billy erect a 20 foot high flag pole to fly the English flag, and we even polished his small brass cannon until it gleamed. He was going to fire a welcoming salute.

What followed was terrible. No sooner had Commissioner Tyers lined up his Native Troopers on their horses, in front of the large welcoming crowd on the foreshore that the trouble started.

"Mr. John Campbell, you will pay me on behalf of the Government 20 pounds for the priveledge of having your store on Government land. If you do not pay me, I will burn down your store."

Well the gasps and outcries from the people was very loud and treatening. However the new Commissioner just didn't care and sat quietly on his horse, although the Captain of the Troopers called out to his men several times to be steady.

After lots of calling out and curses and treating gestures, Mr. Campbell gave in and agreed to pay the Government.

The act was repeated to all the other business owners. settlers were also called out.

Finally!

"Captain Fermaner as Harbour Master, and as a leading person here, in the name of Lt. Gov. La Trobe I demand that you immediately pay me 20 pounds for the privilege of having your house on Government Land, Further, if you do not pay me, I will set fire to your house."

Boy oh boy was Capn. Fermaner fighting mad.

"Like blazes will I give you money. I welcomed you flying the English flag, and with a cannon salute, which I know regret."

"Give me the money!"

"I haven't got 20 pounds. Never had that amount in my life, and I wouldn't pay it to you if I had. I would like to know what right the Government or anybody else has to ask me for 20 pounds for putting up a hut on a sandbank. I have been here with my family for pretty nigh on 3 years. Sometimes nearly starved to death, living a good deal of the time on birds and possums and roast flathead. What right has the Government to send you here to make me pay 20 pounds?"

"Pay me the money or else.!"

"What has the Government done for me or anyone else in Gippsland. The overnment didn't even know it existed until McMillan found it. If anyone should get money it should be the Blacks!"

There was great muttering and noise in the crowd, and the Native Police under their Captain Dana looked very worried. Finally a friend of Captain Fermaner agreed to pay the money on his behalf, so that a riot would not take place.

I know that the Capn. later repaid Mr. Reeves, but from then on he hated Commissioner Tyers and the government. Luckily Commissioner Tyers could not carry out the Capn's duties.

from that day I decided to stay away from Mr. campbells store for a little bit, because he would be still cranky. I also obeyed Capn. Fermaner's orders very quickly. He was absolutely cranky with everyone.

Anyway, our Port Albert seemed to grow bigger and get evenbusier with more and more goods being unloaded, and more stock and agricultural produce being shipped to places. Some ships even came directly from London, with settlers for this area without stopping anywhere on route.

The tracks particularly to Rosedale, Sale and Melbourne, must have been getting better, because more and more people came to Port Albert and the surrounding district.