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The following pages, were written from information gathered from the “Sydney Morning Herald and the Moreton Bay Courier of New South Wales” (1857/1858) housed at the Central Queensland University of Rockhampton by reader Ms. S. R. Palmer-Gard as part of a study to find the beginnings for the idea of Rockhamptons School of Arts and the arrival of the men that initiated, that idea. Research then turned into the many “stories” that could be found between the pages of the newspapers of the day that have “overlooked” by historians because they were thought to be “too politically incorrect to do so”. Other newspapers perused were: The Northern Argus, the Capricornian, and the Morning Bulletin of Rockhampton and the Queenslander and Moreton Bay Courier of Brisbane.

To accentuate the plight of the peoples that made their way to Canoona and survived the journey, this researcher has transcribed one letter to the Editor in full ‘using this script’ and used the reminiscences of another to heighten the description of their personal ordeal ‘using this script’. Another narration is written by a Ship’s Commander ‘using this script’. Each adds another dimension to the ‘Story of Canoona’.



CANOONA – BOOM to BUST in 66 DAYS.

Many past written works of Australia's early history, tell us that Squatters had ventured forth and claimed large tracts of land for themselves, at the behest of the New South Wales Government as much of the land to the North of Sydney was "inhospitable". To open up the "interior" land of the Australian Continent for settlement, a "reward of £50 [pounds] was offered [by the then New South Wales Government] to find and open up new gold fields". This became a priority in 1857 because of the unemployment situation in the heavily populated areas around Sydney N.S.W. One man on that trail was the then Commissioner of Crown Lands Mr. Maurice. C. O'Connell who had been based in Port Curtis since 1854, then "an outpost of the Sydney Government". The people needed a goldfield!

One of the numerous exploratory trips Mr. O'Connell and his 'orderlies', James Boles, Robert Golding, Gt. Reinderhuff and Turic made was on the 11th October 1857 to do an extended tour of the most Northern portion of his district.¹ They reached the very last station on the 17th November 1857. From here they researched an area of four to five miles, testing beds of creeks, washing surface soil and digging holes, with each dish finding "colour"; in total half a pennyweight of fine gold. This news was brought back to Gladstone and the people of the town raised a subscription of 50 pounds, and fitted out a party to prosecute a more thorough search but by December 1857, due to unforeseen circumstances this party was unsuccessful.

By February of 1858, Mr. W.C.Chapple, a gentleman from Warwick with much goldfield experience, set out at the instigation of Mr. O'Connell Esq., the original discoverer of gold in the area; he was to give the ground "a minute examination". Although Mr.Chapple was searching under difficult circumstances, news reached Gladstone of his successful find of gold bearing ground. Another resident of Gladstone, Mr. A. C. Robertson, a Government Resident Surgeon, set out to ascertain the reliability of the news.

On the return to Gladstone and by their endeavors, Messers. Chapple and Robertson, informed a public meeting, chaired by Inspector Murry of the Native Police and held in "a large room of the Gladstone Hotel on the 9th July 1858", where the people of Gladstone were informed of the two men's find and shown samples of gold from the new

¹ **Researchers Note:** Some of these parties i.e. Boles, were already stationed at the Native camp at Murry Lagoon in 1857, for the protection of the Archers and the small settlement that had already established themselves on the Fitzroy River.

field. How the gold was gained, was also of interest. The cradle they had taken with them was useless. All the specimens were obtained by washing the soil in tin pans and pots. Mr. Chapple said that he had found gold in various parts of the district, but he found the first lot on the Fitzroy River near Canoona. This find, averaged out of two pans of earth was, “seven penny weight and four grains of gold”. Mr. Danker, who had just returned from that same area concurred with the meeting, “that this was a paying field”.

It was agreed unanimously that the results of that meeting should be communicated to the Sydney papers. This note was dated the 15th July 1858, and went to Sydney via Captain Hardy of the Schooner the ‘Jenny Lind’² that left Port Curtis on the 21st July 1858, therefore alerting the Captains of Vessels to the new gold field. The “Sydney Morning Herald” reported the news on the 26th July 1858. Advertisements in the shipping columns to the “Fitzroy Diggings” began to appear and were bigger than the notice of the finding of the gold field.³

Soon after the meeting of the 9th July, the people of Gladstone were the first on the field and began to move to Canoona. They were sending back letters, to their friends, associates and to newspapers, glowing reports and their impressions of the new field and their gold finds. By the 14th August there were 80 people on that field. The first most reliable account of the “gold to be won” on the diggings came from a “Mr. Henry Friend, who until recently was a storekeeper in Gladstone”. He had just returned from the field on the 7th August 1858: escorting the first quantity of gold, weighing over 40 ounces and included a nugget. Mr. Friend then returned to the diggings to open a general store.

It was the owners of handcarts, horse carts, bullockies, stores and hotels that were to make money on any goldfield; the new goldfield in the Tropic of Capricorn known as Canoona, was no exception; but the gold fevered men of Canoona didn’t take advantage of the situation. This goldfield only gave the coastal shipowners their chance to make money. They made fortunes carrying men up the coast and fortunes carrying them back again.

From the time of the first advertisement, in the Sydney Morning Herald, of notification of the diggings, on the 26th July 1858 to the 6th September 1858, nine vessels had left for Port Curtis via Moreton Bay, from Sydney.⁴ Sydney ‘hopefuls’ took to the “rush” fast and furiously while Brisbanites were very slow to move. Included in the first “shipments of human cargo” were Sydney’s unemployed. The New South Wales Government saw the Fitzroy Diggings as an opportunity “of clearing the streets of Sydney”. Men, and

² **Researchers Note:** ‘JENNY LIND’ was owned at this time, by [Richard Elliott] Palmer and Frazer, which they bought for the Wide Bay trade in October 1853.]

³ **Researchers Note:** Moreton Bay residents didn’t hear of the find until a copy of the Sydney Morning Herald was sent to the Editor of the “Moreton Bay Courier”, who then reported, on the 1st September 1858, “that gold has been found on the Fitzroy River”. The first vessel for the “Fitzroy Diggings out of Brisbane was the “SARAH”.

⁴ **Researchers Note:** 159 Passengers to Moreton Bay, 92 to Port Curtis. The first vessel to go directly from Sydney to the Fitzroy River was the SWAN, a Brigantine with 77 passengers – a total of 328 persons to the 6th of September out of Sydney.

some women, were transported to the new field, free of charge and kitted out with provisions." There was no "official report of a gold field" by the then Government, in either the Sydney Morning Herald or the Moreton Bay Courier re the Fitzroy Field, but people kept going. Mr. W.H. Wiseman, the then Commissioner of Crown Lands reported on his visit to the Fitzroy diggings on the 26th August 1858, "that there were 200 persons finding gold in satisfactory quantities on the field. The town of Gladstone was deserted and all produce was landed at Rockhampton.

Reports were getting through to the New South Wales Government that it was necessary for official supervision at the diggings. There was drunkenness, complaints from Masters of shipping vessels about their absconding men, and a few of the Chinese were causing trouble by jumping claims belonging to some Englishmen. The Chinese came armed, but were soon disarmed and their weapons given to the store keepers for custody, and a crisis was averted." Provisions were short, as there was no way of procuring transport for the goods that were now arriving daily in Rockhampton. The cartage from Rockhampton, 45 miles away over level ground, cost up to £25 (pounds) per ton, IF drays could be found. "There were only two carts (on the field) and they were used for 'washing stuff' (dirt). Twelve horses carried 'washing stuff' in bags slung across their saddles. It cost 5 to 7 shillings per load to get the 'washing stuff' to water."

During the 30 days of September, saw the influx of 3,537 people arriving on vessels to Keppel Bay or Rockhampton: tents were assembled by those that had them, to await transport to the diggings. There were mishaps along the way, but no great loss of life: some were to go to the diggings and others to barter supplies in Rockhampton. Those that were going to the field were quite unprepared for the trip they had to endure.

Some didn't wait at Keppel Bay for the little steamers that could take them upriver to Rockhampton: they walked from there, some bypassing Rockhampton altogether. All carried their swag and provisions; this was an arduous journey...heat...stench...insects. Those that were walking from Rockhampton had an extra trek of 4 miles through "bogs...swamps...creeks...and lagoons", camping along the way. The 'trek' was, "two days of purgatory; feet worn out; plenty of nothing to eat; and impossible to buy anything on the road...and so tiring that many goods and belongings were left on the road". Many had come on a one-way ticket. If "you had money", there were five vessels: three of which were named Canoona and Adelaide and one steamer named Pancake that took you up river "from above the rocks for 30 miles to within 12 miles of the diggings" disembarking at "Pheasant Point" to await the dray that would transport them to the diggings.

"My parents, myself, my sister and younger brother Henry landed in Rockhampton on September the 14th 1858. On our arrival in Rockhampton a tent was fixed and my father made a wheelbarrow out of an old case and some saplings, which we trundled with our outfit to the Canoona Rush. My mother and the other children remained in Rockhampton

while we sought our fortune...which we reached [Canoona] on the third day.”⁵ When the “diggings” were reached, they were found to be situated on a wide flat of about 70 to 80 acres, formed by a bend of Canoona Creek. A small creek runs down the middle with tributaries running into it, during rainy weather. By the 27th September 1858, 50 acres had been dug over “by surfacing”. Water, filled holes dug to 12 feet, and there were no pumps on the ground to clear them.

A further description comes from a report to the Legislative Council in the Sydney Morning Herald on the 29th September 1859 “The goldfield of Rockhampton (Canoona), is nearly surrounded by lofty mountains, having, however, an entrance by a lofty flat forty miles in extent, from the river (Fitzroy).

“- a kind of natural amphitheatre surrounded by low hills’.

The gold is found upon the soil, or but a few feet below it. Water was obtained by sinking wells from 17 to 20 feet. When the wells are drained at night six feet of water is frequently found in the morning...the heat of the valley is intense...diggers...shield themselves from the heat of the sun under brough’s of trees...As the soil is turned up and washed it becomes loose mud...the whole valley...is assuming this form...becomes necessary to raise timber embankments around the wells...four to five feet high, to prevent the mud running back into the wells” Living quarters of the “diggers” were “four men to a calico tent”.

“The ill-famed Canoona rush was merely a surface show...and sinking was between six inches and two feet...gold was being found at the foot of grass...50 men on payable gold...after a week’s trial...with hundreds arriving daily...we started back for Rockhampton.”

The 21st September 1858 was the start of the return, for those that had not been able to make a living on the Fitzroy gold field. Provisions were scarce. ‘There was soon a dangerous state of affairs amongst these always lawless, and now desperate, men, recruited, as usual, from the greatest rascals of all lands. For starvation stared them in the face, with no possible means of getting away from the place.’⁶

“Water was 6 pence per gallon, the carrying of goods to the field was now £50 (pound) per ton. Picks and shovels 7 shilling and 6 pence each (7/6), flour was 8 pence per pound, meat 3 pence to 5 pence per pound, tea was four shillings (4/-) per pound. Horses, carts, tents and cradles were scarce.” Many “disheartened diggers” returning to Rockhampton, lightened their loads: they either discarded or tried to sell “their chattels” to “new chums” who took no notice of the dire warnings passed onto them of the conditions and the “lack

⁵ **Researchers Note:** Information transcribed in “**Century-School Con**” script is by W. H. RAMM of 140 Annie Street Brisbane and was published in the Courier Mail of Brisbane on the 1st December 1909 on Page 17 in a supplement paper.

⁶ **Researchers Note:** Information transcribed in Chantilly-Medium script is from J. W. Gambier. Commander. – H.M.S. IRIS. ‘Links in my life on Land and Sea.’ Keppel Bay and the Canoona Goldfield. Pages 140 to 153. H.M.S. IRIS arrived in Keppel Bay on the 5th October 1858.

of gold” on the field. The track back to Rockhampton was littered with castoffs of “pannikins, shovels, clothes and swags.”

“Crossing the Fitzroy, our wheelbarrow broke down, and we were compelled to leave portions of our kit behind. But in that there was nothing sangular, the road from Canoona to Rockhampton...was strewn with discarded articles.”

There was no money to be made here! So inexperienced, unprepared and unfit were these people for the tropical climate, and for the labour and privations of the Rockhampton rush, that many languished. Heat stroke, combined with the lack of provisions contributed to the misery of those heading for home. There were twenty deaths reported in the short time of Rockhampton’s earlier existence and many others, probably died unknown. In the week from the 30th September 1858, 1500 people had arrived in Rockhampton. Letters were sent to anyone who would listen. “Dissuade by all means, anybody from coming here.” Great numbers were returning from the diggings, “desperate and heartsick”. ‘Starvation stared them in the face...those amongst them that succeeded in reaching Kepple Bay – where they had disembarked – promptly seized on the small sailing ships lying there, deserted by their crews, and at once set sail, fearing the arrival of other famished hoards, for whom the few provisions left in the ships would not be sufficient...for the voyage back to Brisbane or Sydney...two thousand five hundred miles away.’

Others that had the money returned to Rockhampton, to return south “from whence they came”. There were 2575 of them. Goods and passengers leaving from Sydney returned there without disembarking at Rockhampton. People on the shore of the Fitzroy River were discouraging every new arrival. But still they came.

“When we got back to Rockhampton we could not find our tent...other fortune hunters had arrived...all living under canvas...impossible to tell our 6 x 8 from the rest. [Our domicile was erected on the spot where the old Rockhampton Court House now stands, in the vicinity of a lightning blighted box tree.] The tree was located...and our family reunited. Our mother was in great tribulation over the loss of bread. While baking...that morning she had occasion to leave for a short period, and on lifting the lid on the camp oven on her return...some persons had taken the lot. Food was scarce...and sold at famine prices...semi starvation was the order of the day.”

Although visiting Government Officials had been reporting that “official supervision” was needed on the field since its inception, by way of policemen, customs, medical men and gold escorts, it wasn’t until the first two weeks of October that “officials and buildings” were dispatched from Sydney. Some “Officials” arrived on the “City of Sydney” on the 1st October 1858 and the pre-fabricated buildings arrived on the “Wonga Wonga” on the 14th October 1858. There was one Iron Building, three wooden buildings, bricks and lime, emergency provisions for the six carpenters and one laborer under the supervision of Mr. James Moore, Clerk of Works. Within five weeks the carpenters were on strike.

'The H.M.S. IRIS was sent to Keppel Bay to maintain order. On arrival we established something like martial law...a more cutthroat set of rascals never assembled elsewhere...of every nationality under the sun. There were women...many tramped on foot...from the diggings...shoes worn out...dresses and petticoats in rags...the bulk of them outcasts...lures of the bar saloons of Sydney and Melbourne...We did what we could for these unfortunate women...Later I had the good luck to be invited by Sir Maurice O'Connell, the Deputy-Governor of North Australia, to accompany him up to the diggings...the easiest way to reach there was up the Fitzroy river...We embarked in a small steam launch in charge of a queer old Scotsman, named Sandy⁷. He had become landlord of the leading grog shop in Rockhampton...the late landlord's partner...inured to the ways of sailors and Dockers...going with the business...Her former partner had been knocked on the head by a digger...when he refused a 'pick' in exchange for a drink... Whilst a bottle of beer was worth fifteen to twenty shillings, and a brandy thirty shillings.'

In the above mentioned party was the "new" Gold Commissioner, Mr. T. L. Clotze; he had arrived in Rockhampton in the "Wonga Wonga" on the 14th October 1858 with other Government officials and pre-fabricated buildings. He was to take up his position on the Canoona Field. With him was his horse. To get to the diggings they and the others, boarded "a flat- bottomed nondescript vessel, of about five tons, drawing 20 inches of water called "Pancake". She had a half deck and no cabin, except a little hole...filled with lumber. Standing in the middle of this lumber was the Commissioners horse, an unhappy quadruped that took one third of the vessel to himself and the body servant to wait on him. This pompous and exacting traveler stood with his puzzled head sticking out over the starboard side of the boat, and his tail drooping listlessly on the port gunwale." It took this party two full days to reach "Pheasant Point" the getting off place for Canoona. The monotony of the journey relieved only by the "getting out of the vessel to cut grass for the horse."

(Between the 2nd October and the 9th October 1858 there were 8 vessels with 1,680 passengers for Canoona from Melbourne. Sydney sent 10 vessels with 1,492 passengers. On arrival all were to return, "from whence they came"; Canoona was already a diggings of no future.) By the 6th October there were five troopers on the field (Canoona), led by Inspector W.R.Read. Inspector Detective of Police, Chas E. Harrison, accompanied by Captain Hunter and two constables, arrived a few days later, within 10 miles of the diggings, on the small steamer 'Adelaide'. "There were a few disorderly characters. There were 268 tents housing about 1200 diggers and one sly-grog shop⁸." 'On slightly raised ground stood a police laager⁹, consisting of three good tents, a shanty built of packing cases and tarpaulin, the whole surrounded by wagons and two light carts.' The Governor's arrival created less than a stir...these forlorn men were incapable of taking interest in anything but food...they asked what was

⁷ **Researcher's Note.** 'Sandy' may have been Alexander McKaskell who eventually became licensee of the Alligator hotel.

⁸ Bernard Pene and Autheleme Thozet 'PINK CALICO HOTEL', on the Canoona field.

⁹ Pocket Oxford Dictionary. LAAGER = Encampment – in a circle.

going to be done for them...when they heard nothing was contemplated and Sir Maurice was only there to make arrangements to ship them back to Sydney...they melted away...already on the onset of their desperate march.'

On the 7th October 1858 the vessel "SALEM", Captained by Watt left Port Phillip Heads in Victoria, with 450 passengers, arriving in Keppel Bay twelve days later. They were met by the Steamer, the "SHAMROCK", and told, "that the patch of gold was worked out, and most new arrivals were camped at Rockhampton."

"So we decided to go there, and with our swags and a few necessaries from the ship's store, we shifted into the SHAMROCK, and steamed for the mouth of the Fitzroy River.

We learned that the gold had been discovered some eighty miles up the river at Canoona, not at Port Curtis, as we had expected.

The Fitzroy is a fine river, and in places fully a mile in width. All the way up we passed various kinds of craft loaded with passengers, some stuck on bars and mud banks, waiting for the tide.

The diggers collected about to smoke and discuss the strange country we were passing through, and the foliage peculiar to a tropical country. At forty miles up we arrived at what was called Rockhampton. The river here was about 200 yards wide.

We landed on the banks. The township consisted of a few bark huts, some of which formed the Police camp, and others, which looked like an out station. There were thirty or forty frame and canvas erections, occupied by storekeepers. After taking a general look around we dumped our dunnage, and went seeking a place to camp. Then commenced operations for pitching tents, cutting down saplings for ridgepoles, forks and tent pegs, &c.; gathering dried leaves to spread blankets on, &c. The tents having been put up securely, thanks to our seafaring mates, we dug a trench round to carry off storm water, which we were informed came down suddenly and heavily.

Our next consideration was a square meal. Having bought a side of mutton from a store, with the help of some onions, &c, we had brought from the ship, our sailor mates soon had a sea pie cooking in a bucket suspended from gallows, with a billy for company, and a substantial damper baking in the ashes.

Then we had a look around. For far away, the bush was thick with tents. We estimated the population at from 5000 to 6000.

The evening drawing in, we prepared to turn in and enjoy a rest, after a hard and long day, but we reckoned from our inexperience. Soon we were startled by firearms being let off close to us. It continued from all directions until after midnight – a precaution to ward off intruders.

Sleep was out of the question, and the scene from the front of our tent was something to be remembered – huge fires burning, tents lit up, showing the inmates in curious positions by the shadows cast on the canvas; some playing cards, some singing, and drinking, some loading firearms. And others attending to watchdogs, of which there was a great number chained up in front of tents.

Groups gathered round the fires, gesticulating and shouting, while about 100 yards in front of us a fire lighted at the butt of a hollow tree had mounted up the

pipe, and was roaring out of the top like a furnace. The stars were shining gloriously, and the fireflies, with their lamps, floating about in every direction, were new to us. The mosquitoes were more active than desirable.

Gradually the firing, barking, shouting, &c., ceased, and we slept soundly till daybreak, when we were aroused by the clamour of an awakening camp. Then commenced the labour of the day. One went for fresh water, another for wood for the fire, others were slinging the billy, cooking chops and fritters, and putting the tents, &c., in order. Our party consisted of Harry, Jos, Bob, and George, old diggers and sailors, with my mate Will, and myself.

After breakfast Harry and Jos agreed to do the cooking, &c., for three days, to allow the others to look about, and then we were to take turn about in pairs. Before going for a stroll Jos proposed we should plant our cash, in case of sticking up, which was agreed to, each handing to him his amount of plunder, keeping back a pound or two for present use. He went into one of the tents, and with his sheath knife cut a circular plug from the ground near the center, took off some earth from the bottom and emptied the gold into the hole, replacing the plug, and stamping down.

Fresh crowds were arriving from Keppel Bay and a few arriving from Canoona with bad news.

When we got back for dinner we discovered some Salemites (passengers from the SALEM) had come across our tracks, and decided to camp with us; pitching tents side by side and back to back, so that we could only be approached from the front. This was done, as a matter of precaution, for the place was full of bad characters. Parties cruising about after dark used to stand off and inquire if any City of Hobart boys, Blue Jackets, Admellas, or Salemites were about, as it was not safe to approach without hailing.

Next day we had a meeting to discuss the situation, and decided for each party to send one or two delegates to Canoona and report for the benefit of all. So Harry and Bob were sent to represent us, and with about twenty others proceeded to pack up, taking tea, sugar, and flour, with a spare tent, fly, pick, shovel and tin dish, and billy, which is all they could encumber themselves with.

Having made a bargain with some boatman, they started off the next morning with a running fire of chaff from those on the banks.

In the meantime a main street was forming, billiard saloons, concert rooms, rifle galleries and shanties going up continually. Surveyors marked off streets and other necessary conveniences. Bush ovens were built to make bread, which was badly wanted.

So matters went on for a week.

Things then began to get serious, as some were getting hard up. Great dissatisfaction was felt with the steam ship company's conduct, it being openly stated that they were aware of the failure of the rush while they encouraged it, but a climax was arrived at when they raised the fares 10/- (shillings) to go back to Sydney. Men began to call out for employment. Fights and scimmages were a daily occurrence, but the majority of diggers were well armed, and determined to keep the roughs down. Strict watch was maintained round the tents, and all strangers warned off.

Several hundred diggers returning from Canoona, including our mates, reported that the country all around had been prospected without payable gold being found, while tin dishes were scattered all over the place, with picks driven through the bottom by their disgusted owners. The growlings and discontent now became alarming; the Government Officials began to employ men forming streets, a wharf, &c. We decided that stopping any longer was useless, so I was deputed to take tickets by the EAGLE steamer, which had just arrived from Sydney...Next morning...there was a row over at the steamship's company tent...angry and excited mob...one of the Officer's trying to pacify them. Captain Moody I think. I pushed my way to the front...on producing my ticket the 10/- (shillings) was refunded. We packet up, and as soon as the steamer was made ready made our way on board. (28th October 1858) The EAGLE was a screw boat of some 300 to 400 tons, Captained by Chatfield. Although crowded, we managed pretty well going down river, but after we got in the bay, past the shipping, which had considerably increased since we arrived, we began to have a foretaste of what was coming as we sought for berths. These were all occupied, and the tables and floors below. Even the coalbunkers were full of men, and things looked somewhat mixed when we found a couple of hundred on deck that had to coil as best they could. On a vessel to charter to carry 112 men, including officers and crew, there were 400 souls. Cooking for this lot was impossible.

The tea was put in the boilers by the bucketful, and when served out looked and tasted like a decoction of bark and soot. Large pieces of beef were distributed half raw, and with ship's biscuit we had to make the best of it. After passing the night on deck, smoking and yarning, the morning came in miserable enough. Breakfast the same as the night before; ditto dinner, with the addition of some potatoes which had to be fought for by those who got them, and for this we were charged 20/- a day.

Soon I could not take the food...became very sick and prostrated. At night we managed to get our swags on the engine house, when it commenced to rain, the tropical downpour lasting all night. Next day we sat with our blankets over our heads, the rain running down our skin and out of our boots. The crew could scarcely get about to work the vessel, and she rolled to such an extent we thought she would turn turtle, and did not care much. The next day we were drying in the sun until she looked like a huge vapour bath. On the 6th day we reached Sydney Heads. (3rd November 1858)¹⁰

At the end of October 1858, the Sydney Morning Herald was reporting that, "the good citizens of Sydney were (again) blaming the Government for the unemployment problem", which was caused by the destitute diggers returning from Canoona. The "concerned citizens" of Sydney started up a digger's employment fund asking for public subscriptions. They solved the problem by offering each bona fide digger arriving back at Sydney's port that he "would have his luggage conveyed, and provided with usual rations while on the road and for a reasonable time, AFTER arrival at his chosen destination, and traveled by dray or steamer as might be arranged to whatever goldfield was chosen".

¹⁰First printed in the AUSTRALIASIAN. Reprinted as OLD TIME MEMORIES - The Morning Bulletin. Rockhampton, Tuesday 11th December 1894. Page 6.

'We remained in Canoona for two days, and then started back, going by road all the way. We heard...numbers of men and women...never reached Keppel Bay...We came across the body of a man we met on the way up...where he now lay...he had not traveled five miles after we left him...his Gin bottle was empty...his body swarming with red ants...an indescribably horrid spectacle.'

Although men were returning from Canoona disheartened, licenses were being issued to storekeepers on that field in the first week of November, by the then Gold Commissioner Mr. Coeltz: they were Messers Hetherington and Co. of Gladstone, Mr. Ramsay and Gaden of Canoona Station (supplying goods for cash only), Henry Williams, H. E. Palmer, James Mc Donald and Robert Phelps. There were many complaints re Gaden and Ramsay taking "advantage" of the people who were still arriving in great numbers. Mr. Ramsay was also in partnership with a Mr. Mc Cartney, as butchers; "They got their bullocks from Mr. Robinson at Rannas Station, at £5 (pounds) each – now they are £7 each". As meat became scarce and prices soured, "a bullock was sent to the diggings, cut into pieces, and was scrambled for, rather than sold." (Captain O'Reilly of the "Boomerang" told how he had exchanged "100 ounces of gold for some meat", in Rockhampton on the 8th October.) There was a Blacksmith and the "ever ending supply, of 'grog' from sly grog shops". A quantity of spirits (sly-grog) was brought onto the ground and the charge was £1 (pound) per bottle, which soon rose to thirty shillings (30/- or £1/10/-) (By the 21st October, Mr. Thozet's [and Pene], "Pink Calico Hotel (never licensed), with its pink chaise lounge", had arrived and had been erected, for commercial purposes, in the most thickly-tented portion of the diggings, and, therefore in a favorable place: as did the only "permanent Residence" on the field, which was that of the Gold Commissioner Mr. J. L. Coltze. This was finished by the 3rd of November 1858. Mr. J.B.P.Ramsay Esq. ran mail into Rockhampton once a fortnight to meet the "Jenny Lind", a schooner belonging to the Archers.¹¹ (On the arrival of Mr. Coltze, the Government took over the "Post Office" duties.)

For those Victorians that wanted to get home the Government of Victoria conveyed their diggers back, giving each man a promissory note, at three months, of five pounds for his passage. **'When the Victorian Government heard of the deplorable conditions in Rockhampton, to their honorable it said, they took a statesmanlike grip of the situation by chartering four fast steamers to bring all Victorians back to Melbourne, their actions saving the lives of thousands...the steamers were rushed...all seeking passage swore they came from Victoria. Although we came from Sydney...we were at the point of boarding for Victoria when my father, a carpenter, was offered a contract to build a house at Calliungal Station, 60 Miles from Rockhampton, for a Mr. Robison.'**

¹¹ **Researchers Note:** at this time the Jenny Lind was owned by R. E. Palmer and Frazer who bought the vessel in October 1853 for the Wide Bay Trade [Maryborough]; it was bought and owned by the Archers after it was ship wrecked.

Others stayed on the field; hoping. One Hundred and Fifty diggers went to the Gracemere gold field of the Archers, others waited for help from family and friends. Many 'destitute diggers' walked to Gladstone.

Sydney Morning Herald's correspondent, reported as he left Rockhampton on the 26th November 1858. "The township (Rockhampton) is in a state of rapid collapse. Storekeepers are winding up as quickly as possible. Disconsolate diggers are waiting the only means of transport. More than 200 persons in the township are awaiting the "Eagle" in anticipation of leaving (18th December 1858). Fifty persons have secured passage on the "Amherst", four or five hundred remain on the diggings with neither the means to support themselves in Rockhampton or the return passage to Sydney." In the 22 days between the 26th of November and the 18th December 1858, thirteen vessels had called into Rockhampton conveying the stragglers southwards.

66 days have passed from the first vessel that landed in Rockhampton for the Canoona field, to the first vessel that returned south with disillusioned diggers. In that time over 3000 people "tramped over the tracks", winning, supposedly over 2377 ounces of gold. Small returns for such suffering.

[Although "estimates" have been bandied about, about the quantity of gold taken from the Fitzroy diggings (Canoona), to the end of December 1858, it is reported that ships Captains from Rockhampton, had declared 1324 ounces. Customs through Port Curtis for that same period had declared 1053 ounces, totaling 2377 ounces. The Sydney branch of the Royal Mint reports that they had bought less than 400 ounces for the same period. So where was the gold?]

Canoona, the most disillusioned "rush" in Australia's history.

Researcher and Transcriber:

**Ms. Suzanne Rose Palmer-Gard.
29 Windah Street,
KABRA. Qld. 4702
Ph: 07 49331798.**

Q.S.A. Reader and Researcher:

**Ms. Fay Paull.
12 Marshall Street,
KINGSTON. Qld. 4114**