

James Bonwick.



*John Batman,
the Founder
of Victoria.*

James Bonwick.

John Batman, the Founder of Victoria.



Published by Good Press, 2022

goodpress@okpublishing.info

EAN 4066338068712

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE.

LIFE OF MR. JOHN BATMAN.

LIFE OF MR. FAWKNER.

HOW MR. BATMAN THOUGHT OF SETTLING PORT PHILLIP.

MR. BATMAN'S VISIT TO PORT PHILLIP.

OFFICIAL CORRESPONDENCE OF MR. BATMAN.

WHAT THE PRESS SAID OF MR. BATMAN'S VISIT.

MR. FAWKNER'S NARRATIVE.

ORIGIN OF MR. FAWKNER'S COLONISATION.

WHERE DID MR. FAWKNER INTEND TO SETTLE?

MR. FAWKNER'S STORY OF MR. JOHN HELDER WEDGE.

THE CAPTAIN'S STORY.

MR. GEORGE EVANS IN MELBOURNE.

MR. SAM[S]'S PART IN THE SETTLEMENT.

THE PORT PHILLIP ASSOCIATION.

MR. BATMAN'S TREATY WITH THE NATIVES

DID BATMAN SEE THE YARRA FIRST?

THE FIRST SQUATTER IN PORT PHILLIP BAY.

DIVISION OF THE SPOIL.

HOW TO TREAT A SQUATTER.

THE FOUNDING OF MELBOURNE.

MR. FAWKNER ON THE PRIVATE CHARACTER OF HIS.

COTEMPORARIES.

CONCLUSION.

PREFACE.

[Table of Contents](#)

The birth of great nations is always regarded with interest. The Roman historians, unable to penetrate, the gloom of their past and unwilling to claim a contemptible origin, boldly allied themselves with the celestial Olympus, and made their Romulus the son of a god. A Niebuhr has shattered the fairy fabric of those early days, and robbed our youth of the charming tale of wolf-nursed heroes. Yet who that trod the palaces of the Cæsars, and wondered at the glory of old Rome, would not throw a glance backward, and wish to know the source of so much majesty! And here, in this Melbourne of to-day, with its one hundred and thirty thousand inhabitants, and its noble Inter-Colonial Exhibition, as we look upon a sixty-foot pyramid of Victorian gold, can we be otherwise than deeply interested in the origin of our colony!

It is with a view of settling this important question, that the present work is submitted to the Australian public. And a very trying task has it been to write such early history. I arrived in the colonies five years only after the first great exodus from Tasmania to Hobson's Bay, and two years after a settled Government of the Province here. I was personally acquainted with several of the leaders of the Port Phillip movement. I have made it my business for many years to converse with primitive settlers, and search through old records, to be correctly informed of the colonial past; and yet, with all my care and research, I have failed to satisfy my mind upon certain historical points. If such have been

my difficulties to arrive at the truth of events so near our own day, what dependence can be placed in the histories of remoter times, written—it may be—by prejudiced partizans or careless collectors of facts? As a curious illustration of the difficulty of reconciling evidence in the formation of history, it may be mentioned that Wellington's mother said he was born at Dangan Castle, Westmeath, on the first of May, while the nurse affirms he was born at Dublin, on the sixth of March!

To several gentlemen who have kindly contributed to my literary stores I must confess myself deeply indebted; but especially to the Rev. R.K. Ewing, of Launceston, to the Hon. J.H. Wedge, and to W.J. Sams, Esq.

It is now twenty-one years since the first edition of my *Australian Geography* appeared; and I hope before long to bring out, for the *Australian Youth*, my story of the Last of the Tasmanians, upon which I have been occupied many years. To my fellow-colonists I am grateful for encouragement.

JAMES BONWICK.

ST. KILDA, Victoria,

January 1, 1867.

JOHN BATMAN

THE FOUNDER OF VICTORIA

LIFE OF MR. JOHN BATMAN.

[Table of Contents](#)

Twenty-five

years ago I was wandering about the sources of the River Jordan at Jericho, beyond Jerusalem, in Van Diemen's Land, as it was then called. Stooping to drink at the prosaic, hoof-trodden springs, I heard my guide say, "Ah! it was bloody enough once. I shot a lot of crows about here. I caught them camping near, and dropped them down at night."

Understanding that the

crows

were blacks, and expressing my shocked feelings, the rough farmer condescended to explain. After a sort of apology he added, "But John Batman didn't knock them down like that, for he and they understood one another." "What Batman do you mean?" was my inquiry. "The fellow that made Port Phillip, to be sure", answered he. "O," said I, "that is the new colony across the Straits." "Just so," was his reply; "and he might have saved himself the trouble, for they are all smashing to pieces, and coming back here again."

This was my first personal introduction to the name of John Batman, and sad enough were the prospects of the little colony at that time. Numbers were returning to Van Diemen's Land.

A year passed, when a holiday trip to Avoca—the charming meeting-place of waters—brought me under the shadow of the greenstone pile of Ben Lomond, near which, by me, stood the house and farm of John Batman's home at Kingston. Again, and on the adjoining estate to his own, did I hear tales of this remarkable man.

And what have I heard? They told me stories of bloodthirsty natives brought in by the bold hunter, and retained by his spirit of kindness. They spoke of wondrous feats of horseback—bush tracking—endurance of hunger, thirst, and fatigue—and a successful capture of dreadful

armed outlaws. I learned that this man of iron nerve, of powerful frame, and daring courage, had the manners of a gentleman, the simplicity of a child, the tenderness of a woman.

Need it be wondered, then, that I thought kindly of the man; that I felt jealous for his honour when I found it afterwards so grossly impugned. I am not the apologist for his frailties, though such were all but universal then in the colony. Blemishes of the same sort have, unfortunately, been attached to the fair fame of many whom the world justly regard as heroes and benefactors. John Batman, in spite of his love of drink, fostered and encouraged by the house kept by the man who can now so freely speak of his victim, and in spite of his unhappy devotion to the other sex, was what his fellow-citizens esteemed honest and honourable. He was heroic in his nature, seeking enterprises of danger, and engaging in noble labours. There is no little merit in him who opens up a wilderness to his race, and leads thousands to a happy home in a strange land.

Not only have Governors spoken highly of the man, but philanthropists, like Mr. Backhouse, have hailed his efforts. His interest in the aboriginal inhabitants will alone entitle him to gratitude. The Rev. J.H. West, in his History, speaks thus of him—"To Mr. Batman belongs the praise of mingling humanity with severity, of perceiving human affections in the creatures he was commissioned to resist. He certainly began in the midst of conflict and bloodshed to try the softer influence of conciliation and charity—being one of the few who entertained a strong confidence in the power of kindness." Mr. Melville, in his Australian history, being well

acquainted with the person, speaks of him that he "proceeded not with the sword, but with the olive branch." This is not the man to be sneered at for his treaty with the Port Phillip Blacks, whom he believed to belong to the brotherhood of nations, and whom he sought to treat with the justice and truth to which their position entitled them.

As to his veracity, it was unquestioned by those who knew him best. His old friend, the captain, calls him "a kind-hearted, heroic, and truthful man". The excellent Mr. George Washington Walker, the Quaker missionary, often spoke to me of his regard for John Batman. Mr. Henry Wedge, one of our esteemed fellow-colonists, writes—"He was always considered a gentleman and man of honour." Mr. Henry Jennings, our well-known Melbourne solicitor, can add—"I do not think he would write falsehoods." The *Cornwall Chronicle* utters the same hearty feeling—"We are certain that our brethren of Victoria will only be too glad to do justice to the memory of a man whose name will always be cherished by the early settlers of this colony." Honest old Captain Robson asserts that "he was a brave, athletic, daring, resolute man, fearing nothing—neither wind nor weather. His perseverance was beyond anything I ever saw." But Mr. William Robertson, of Colac, one of our best known and honoured old colonists, and one of the real founders of the colony, writes thus to me in full about his former friend:—

"I am glad to have been afforded an opportunity of adding my testimony to that of your other correspondents in favour of John Batman; and am pleased to think that by doing so I may assist somewhat in rescuing his name and memory from undeserved obloquy. My acquaintance with

Mr. John Batman dates many years before the expedition to Victoria was contemplated; and from that time up to the day of his death had so many opportunities of forming a judgment of what kind of a man he was, that I have not the slightest hesitation in assuring you that his character for veracity and probity cannot, with regard to the truth, be in the slightest degree impugned. From my own observation, as well as from what I have heard from those who were even more intimately connected with him than I was, my opinion is that his narrative may be taken as a strictly truthful report of what he himself did, and of all that occurred under his immediate notice."

Mr. John Batman, unlike Mr. Fawkner, was a colonial youth. He was born in 1800, at Parramatta, in New South Wales. His father was one of the famous band of missionaries first sent to the South Sea isles, but forced to leave Tahiti through a desolating war. Mr. William Batman, like several others, fled to the nearest British settlement, that of Sydney, in 1797; that is, nine years after its foundation. He betook himself to some business engagement, and continued to remain in the colony till his death. In a Sydney magazine of February, 1834, there is this notice of his decease:—"29th, at Parramatta, Mr. William Batman, aged sixty-nine years. He resided in the colony thirty-seven years, was highly respected, and his loss will be long felt by a numerous circle of friends and acquaintances." Mrs. Batman, sen., outlived her son a few months, dying in 1839. He was much attached to his mother.

About 1820 a love adventure led to his leaving home and settling in Van Diemen's Land. He early directed his

attention to farming on the northern side of the island. But powerful in frame, well proportioned, of a goodly stature, robust in health, full of exuberant spirits, with a love of adventure, he was not the person for a quiet routine of duty, or the steady pursuit of a business. He was passionately fond of hunting, and of exploring new tracks in the dense forests of his island home. All who knew him assert that he was the finest bushman of their acquaintance; no danger appalled him, no difficulties turned him. It is not surprising then that, as he always sided with law and order in the community, he should take a part with other colonists in hunting down the bushrangers of the period. For such services he received a grant of land.

But in a more important work he was next engaged. The Tasmanian blacks and the colonists came into open and active warfare. Fearful atrocities marked the conduct of both combatants. Mr. Batman, in 1829, was put in command of a party. The object of the Government was to capture, not destroy; but many took that opportunity of glutting private revenge, or the instincts of a savage nature, in brutal attacks upon defenceless and harmless aborigines. Unusual success attended the efforts of our founder, and ample rewards followed the performance of such dangerous work. The historian of Tasmania has this noble record:—"Among those distinguished for their knowledge of the bush, compassion for the natives, and skill in pursuing them, Mr. Batman is the subject of frequent and approved mention."

His domestic relations are not without interest. A romantic attachment for a beautiful girl, under circumstances appealing to his pity and gallantry, and

enlisting the warm sympathy of the Governor of the colony, ended in a marriage. The fruits of this union appeared in one son and several daughters. Whatever the early and later stories of the pair, it is pleasing to record the fact that their home, under Ben Lomond, at the fine farm of Kingston, was a very happy one. From three of the daughters I have learned that the children were well educated and trained, taught the Scriptures, and even religiously cared for. Several old settlers have spoken to me most kindly of that part of their lives. The Governor, himself a man of family and of Christian character, liked to call in at the homestead, and warmly praised the domestic managements. An old friend, who had many opportunities of seeing the Batman family, assured me that it always gave him great pleasure to see the admirable way in which the children were trained, and the order and comfort of the whole establishment. However dense and dark the cloud that subsequently overshadowed them in this Port Philip, and covers history with gloom, it is pleasing to state their Tasmanian career.

The story of his connection with this colony will be found elsewhere. It was natural that so active a spirit, and so intelligent and adventurous a man, should think of the land across the straits lying neglected and forlorn. It is now forty years ago since our founder's attention was turned in a practical shape towards the inviting shore. He found an associate in Mr. Gellibrand, once Attorney-General of Van Diemen's Land, a kindred genius. They made official application for a settlement there, but failed. In 1835, however, the worthy pair saw, as they fondly believed, the realisation of their dreams of rich land and sheep pastures.

Established in Melbourne with abundant means. Government favour, and an influential connection, Mr. Batman for a time was the ruling spirit of the little settlement. The *Sydney Gazette* of April, 1836, calls him "the *locum tenens* of the Lieutenant-Governor." But the old evils of a rude civilisation followed his prosperity, ruined his health, disordered his family, brought mm to an early grave in 1839, and scattered as well as blasted his once beautiful and happy home. No one bears his name. His two grandsons with us, sons of Mr. William Weire, of Geelong, by Elizabeth, the fourth daughter, needing the active generosity, as well as sympathy of colonists, are all remaining in Victoria of the race of John Batman. No son was left to his brother Henry, though I know one of his daughters. A sad shade has fallen on all. While Mr. Fawkner never had a child to inherit his name, his rival has left no one to take the honoured name of Batman.

LIFE OF MR. FAWKNER.

[Table of Contents](#)

Although this honorable gentleman has at various times given us scraps of his interesting autobiography, all colonists would appreciate his reminiscences of other periods and places as well as those with which we have at present to be contented. He lived through the whole of the aboriginal past of Van Diemen's Land as well as of Port Phillip; and being a man of remarkable powers of observation, fearless intrepidity, restless enterprise, and public spirit, no one perhaps could give us so striking a chronicle.

To satisfy the reader, a short sketch of his career will be made—the materials being from his own remarks, and those given by the press when friendly with him; and therefore from his own dictation.

Born within the sound of Bow Bells, in 1792, and receiving the rudiments of education in London, he left England when a lad of ten years to follow his unfortunate father to this side of the world. His mother and sister were also permitted to sail with the party forming a convict settlement at Port Phillip, toward the end of 1803. Removed afterwards to Van Diemen's Land, the *Age* says—"As the Fawkners were a family together, they lost no time in building a hut for themselves." His mother returned to Europe in two years, and the son and father lived for some years about eight miles from Hobart Town. When afterwards living near to the spot, I saw the remains of the chimney of their ancient habitation. The old man was well-known for certain harmless peculiarities, not forsaking the ancient fashions of dress, and preserving that rugged independence of manner which he has communicated to his son. When I last saw him (one of the few original Derwenters,) he seemed so hale, as if resolved to keep our Melbourne hero, J.P. Fawkner, jun., till fourscore years. Heartily do we wish, for the sake of the colony, that the son may live to the age of his father.

The little farm, a grant to the family, was no great success, and when eighteen years old the hero of our tale became a sawyer. "In the year 1814," according to the *Age* article, "he was induced, in the enthusiasm of youth, indiscreetly to furnish funds, and assist a party of seven

persons to build and provide a cutter, lugger-rigged, in which they were to escape from their bondage in the island. The vessel was built, provisioned, and ready for sea, when two of the number discovered the plot to the authorities. These two persons slipped the cable from the bay in which it had been built, and ran the cutter up to Hobart Town, betraying all concerned; and Mr. Fawkner was included among the persons arrested by the Crown. This portion of Mr. Fawkner's life, as a matter of course, has been the subject of much misrepresentations. It has been tortured into the gravest charges against him. The result of this act of indiscretion was that he left for Sydney, and did not return till March, 1817."

Not wishing to feed the appetites of scandal-mongers, nor gauge the depths of a social state so far removed from our own, I have contented myself with the statement of that part of his history from what is virtually Mr. Fawkner's own narrative. It would not have been right to have omitted a reference to it, nor proper to have plunged into vague rumours of slander, because the individual had feasted himself and his auditors upon such a dainty dish, at the expense of the dead. Although a public personage, with rancorous foes, the temptation to exhibit his private weaknesses is to be resisted as unworthy of the historian, and contemptible in manhood. For such reasons we hasten forward to his Launceston career. In 1826 he opened the Cornwall Hotel in that town, and conducted it with ability and success till 1836. In 1829 he originated the *Launceston Advertiser*, and, although having an editor, wrote often in its pages himself. This he disposed of in two years.

His Port Phillip career is the one in which we are most interested, and about which there is less occasion for gloss or silence. Here he stands forth prominently a public man, and challenges the public criticism. And in truth, whatever prejudices may be entertained against him personally, his worst opponents concede that his attacks have been as open as they were bitter. He allowed them no quarter, and so exposed himself to their unrelenting return. But it will be at the same time admitted—and this is his *crowning glory*—that his contests, however personal and envenomed, were not conducted for his own pecuniary profit, and that *he never served his country that he might be served*.

Rightly contending with him, as I do, upon his language in reference to the foundation of this colony, I am as ready as other old colonists to acknowledge the important and useful part he has played in the politics of Port Phillip. He has ever been the advocate of civil and religious rights of freedom. He has ever been the bold defier of oppression and the stem denouncer of official wrong. He it was who dared the breach to crush the ancient foe of colonial justice and honour—the venal Major St. John. Nothing, perhaps, but his very vehemence of onset, his very persistent, hang-dog bite, his very inaccessibility to soft appeals, could have thrown down that monstrous evil of our infant days. And this is but one of many such good deeds. His labours to plant the people upon the public lands, entitle him to gratitude; though his determined opposition to the introduction of convicts into the colony exposed him to some raillery and scorn.