

EDWARD CLARK – EXTRACT

The story of Edward Clark was told to us, as written, in the following history by his great granddaughter who together with her sister paid a visit to the Basildon Heritage Society here at Wat Tyler Country Park in 2018.

Edward Clark was born on 27th April 1830 in Basildon Hall Farm, the son of George and Honor Clark (nee Nevill) one of at least twelve children born in the family between 1821 and 1842.

Edward Clark was born on 27th April 1830 and Baptised at Holy Cross Church on 13th June 1830. The son of George Clark (born 13th July 1790 in West Hanningfield Essex), who contracted Typhoid, then generally a fatal disease and was buried on 22nd August 1846 aged 55 years at Holy Cross Churchyard leaving nine surviving children) and his wife, Honor Nevill.

Edward and his Brother James, left England in 1848 and arrived in Geelong in March 1849. Edward was 18 and James 21 years of age. Why did they decide to emigrate and why Australia? Probably due to migration being encouraged in Britain as a way of dealing with high unemployment as a result of the Industrial Revolution taking place and it is also possible that the boys saw limited future for themselves in England.

When Edward and James Clark arrived in 1849, the State of Victoria did not exist but was known as the Port Phillip District, still part of New South Wales and separation from New South Wales did not occur until 11th November 1850 when the young Queen Victoria consented to giving her name to this new colony.

As the 'penal colony' image declined, it led to a growing appeal to a wider demographic society of migrants to Australia. Employers were forced to increase wages, but this was still not sufficient to provide enough labour, so various systems of 'assisted migration' was introduced.

Perhaps it was this that impacted on their decision to come to Australia. The records show that they were both 'assisted migrants' which meant their fares were paid in return for a period of work with a nominated employer. They were assigned to M. Holmes of Barrabool Hills (near Geelong) for three months, with rations and for £20 per annum.

By November 1849 Melbourne had 23,000 residents. Most of the central square mile was built up. The only buildings that survive are the Russell Street Courthouse and the jail. This was the situation that Edward and his brother James Clark would discover upon their arrival. They would have been daunted by the prospect of owning their own land, if this was their ambition. In fact, it probably appeared to them to be a replica of the English system they had just left.

Edward had married an Irish Catholic girl, Mary Connellan from Lisroe in County Clare Ireland, on 8th March 1859, at St. Alipius Church Ballarat, she had also migrated as an assisted migrant arriving at Port Henry in Geelong on 11th July 1854. It is mentioned on the passenger manifest that she was approximately 21 years of age and illiterate but had contract with a Mr. McNamara of South Geelong to be a Farm Servant for three years.

In 1850 the Port Phillip District separated from New South Wales and the young Queen consented to the new colony bearing her new Victoria. It was given the same form of government as New South Wales and was formally in the hands of a Lieutenant Governor Charles La Trobe and an Executive Council of no more than four members nominated by the Crown (probably dominated by squatters).

In August 1851, La Trobe reported the discovery of gold at Ballarat. The government soon had to extend its rule over a wide area. Thousands of diggers were concentrated in places such as Ballarat, Omeo, Bendigo, hitherto isolated and the haunt only of sheep, cattle or kangaroos.

Apart from the massive increase in the population and the wealth of the new colony, the gold rush led to dramatic social changes that probably also changed the prospects of immigrants such as Edward and James Clark. The astute soon realised that a lucrative living could be made supplying the goldfields and growing provisions, more than actually finding gold and we believe that Edward was one of these astute residents.

In Edward's final years, after establishing his two eldest sons, Edward returned to Navigators where Mary had died in 1891. Her tombstone says that she was 53 but this is a mistake as she was probably up to 5 years older. Edward died in 1908 aged 77 years.

Maria Ryan - Great Granddaughter of Edward Clark a Basildon Boy and a Victorian Man!