

# SUNNY CORNER

A SILVER TOWN OF THE

—  1880s  —

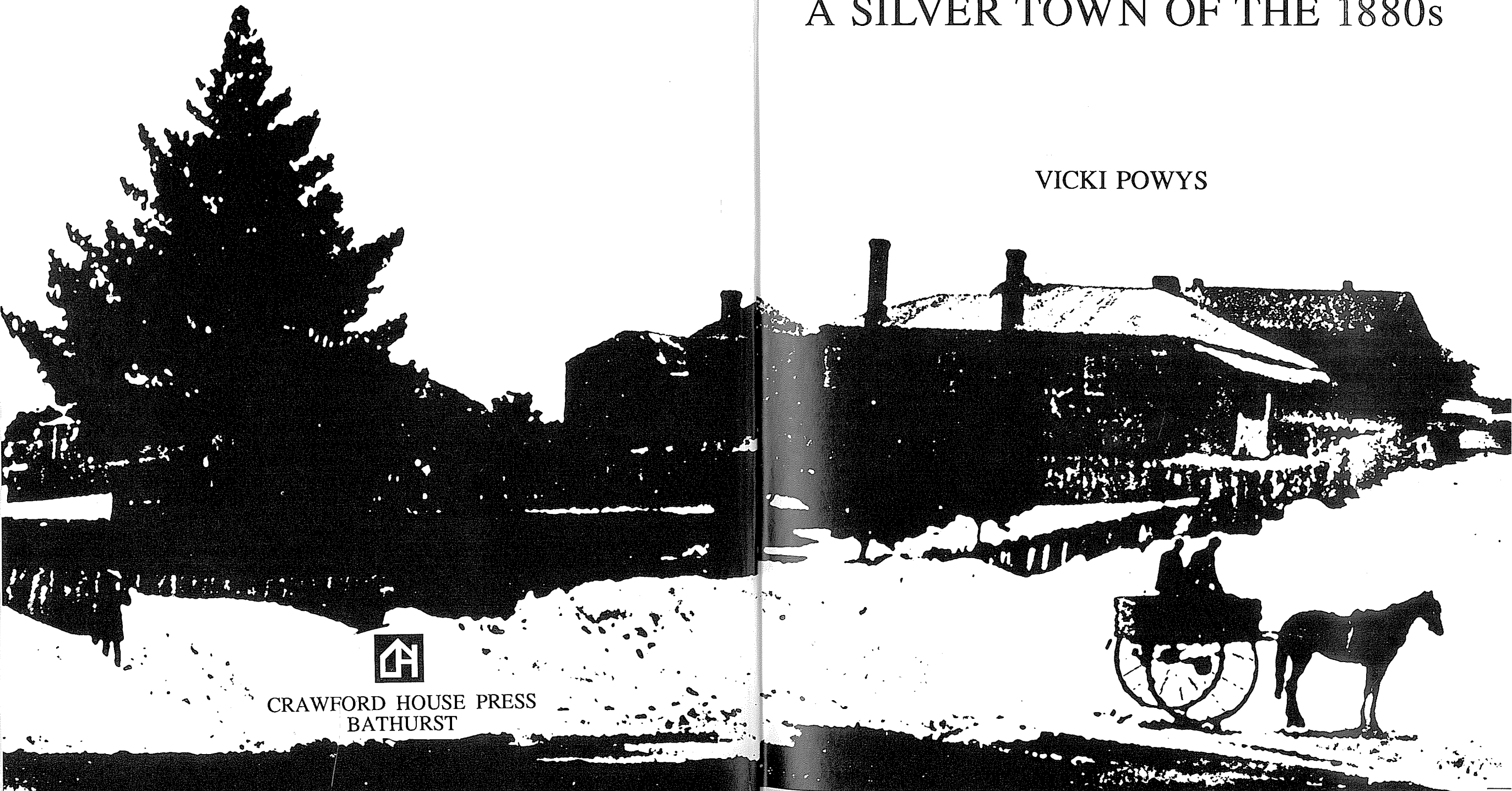
VICKI POWYS



# SUNNY CORNER

A SILVER TOWN OF THE 1880s

VICKI POWYS



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## CONTENTS

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A Brief History of Sunny Corner	vi
Preface	viii
Sunny Corner Locality Map	ix
Map of Mine Leases	x
PART I – THE MINES	
Sunny Corner Silver Mine	1
Map of Sunny Corner mine – Underground Workings	6
Map of Sunny Corner mine – Surface Installations	42
Silver King Mine	49
Nevada Mine	54
Great Western Mine	60
Tonkin's Mine	61
Public Smelter	62
Lesser Silver Mines of Sunny Corner	63
Gold Mines of Sunny Corner and Dark Corner	64
Health and Pollution	71
PART II – THE TOWN	
In the Early Days of Mitchell's Creek	79
Map of Sunny Corner Township – 1880s and 1890s	80
Settlement at Sunny Corner	82
The Naming of Sunny Corner	107
Sunny Corner Hospital	108
Hotels	110
Churches	123
Police Station and Court House	132
Post Offices	133
Schools	139
Known Shops, Businesses and Government Establishments in Sunny Corner	155
Life After the Mine, 1900-1980s	165
The Story of "Slippery Jack"	172
PART III – THE ENVIRONMENT	
Aboriginal History	180
Environment of Sunny Corner	184
Map of Sunny Corner Reserves – 1989	193
PART IV – STORIES	
Tales and Characters of Sunny Corner, by Col Wilkinson	195
Acknowledgements	210
Index	211

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A BRIEF HISTORY OF SUNNY CORNER

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- 1850s Gold found at Mitchell's Creek, settlement begun.  
1862 P.O. opened at Mitchell's Creek, pop. 700 - 2,000  
1864 Public School opened at Mitchell's Creek (64 pupils). There was also a church, two hotels and several stores.  
1860s Gold miners worked quartz reefs in the district, especially Big Hill & 1870s and Little Hill, also Sunny Corner.  
1865-78 Winters and Morgan gold lease worked on Sunny Corner mine site.  
1877 Silver content noted by Mining Registrar.  
1879 Winters & Morgan lease taken over by Shepherd & Hurley but still worked for gold.  
1881 Assays show Sunny Corner mine to be rich in silver.  
1881-3 Trial shipment of ore sent to England but unprofitable due to transport costs – decision made to smelt silver ore at the mine site.  
1884 Formation of the Sunny Corner Silver Mining Company. American technology imported. First Pacific smelter in blast 27th August 1884. This was the first time that silver had been successfully smelted anywhere in Australia. Second Probert smelter in blast by December. Township of Sunny Corner commenced, pop. 1500.  
1885 Population grows to 4,000. P.O. opens. Township named Mitchell (renamed Sunny Corner 1887) – numerous shops, hotels, churches, two banks, sawmills. Sunny Corner mine has seven smelters in blast by December. Half mile flue built. Silver King mine has two smelters in blast by December. Nevada mine begins smelting in October then stops. Public smelter in blast end of year. Up to thirty different companies and syndicates formed.  
1886 Sulphide problem encountered. Silver King smelters stopped in June for next eighteen months. Sunny Corner mine experiments in treating ore but still employs 400 men. Failure of many small companies. School transferred from Mitchell's Creek to Sunny Corner.  
1887 Population drops from 4000 to 1700. Public smelter closes down. Sunny Corner mine continues experiments.  
1888 Silver King mine re-opens. Sunny Corner mine still employs 400 men.  
1889 Great improvements begun at Sunny Corner mine and Silver King working well.  
1890 Slag-block boilerhouse and other works built at Sunny Corner mine. New quarter mile brick flue and five new smelters. Silver King mine closed down (mined out).  
1891 Brick chimney completed. Town water laid on from reservoir.  
1892 Silver price halved – mines now uneconomic. Sunny Corner mine closes.  
1893-6 Sunny Corner mine let on tribute to J.K. Charleston, 100 employed, reduced output.

- 1897 Sunny Corner mine lease held by Charleston and Gardner but mine idle.  
-1900  
1900 Sunny mine re-opened, 100 employed.  
1901 Nevada mine connected to Sunny Corner mine with tramline.  
1902 Both mines closed again.  
1903-13 Small scale working only at Sunny Corner. Many buildings and houses from Sunny Corner are dismantled and moved to Portland (new cement town).  
1913 Exploration of Sunny Corner mine by Zinc Corporation – conclusion that it would be uneconomic to mine.  
1917-22 Sunny Corner mine worked by W.B. Wilkinson on a small scale.  
1922 Sunny Corner's last hotel closes (the Royal).  
1937 Mine leases taken over by Wrights, small scale working.  
1932-88 Feasibility studies done by various large companies – all concluded that minerals remain but are uneconomic to mine.  
1947 Extensive pine plantations begun in Sunny Corner district.  
1979 Sunny Corner school closed.  
1984 Sunny Corner mine declared an historic site by the Department of Lands.  
1985 Sunny Corner mine ruins classified by the National Trust. Post office closes.  
1989 Sunny Corner population about 100.



## PREFACE

The following chapters on the history of Sunny Corner and surrounding district are designed to be read in any order, according to the interests of the reader.

The first time a history of Sunny Corner was compiled was in 1961 when a centenary booklet was written by Trevor Parmenter who was then the local schoolteacher.

This new book now attempts a more comprehensive history of Sunny Corner and has involved several years of research.

Vicki Powys  
Sunny Corner, 1989

### Imperial – Decimal System

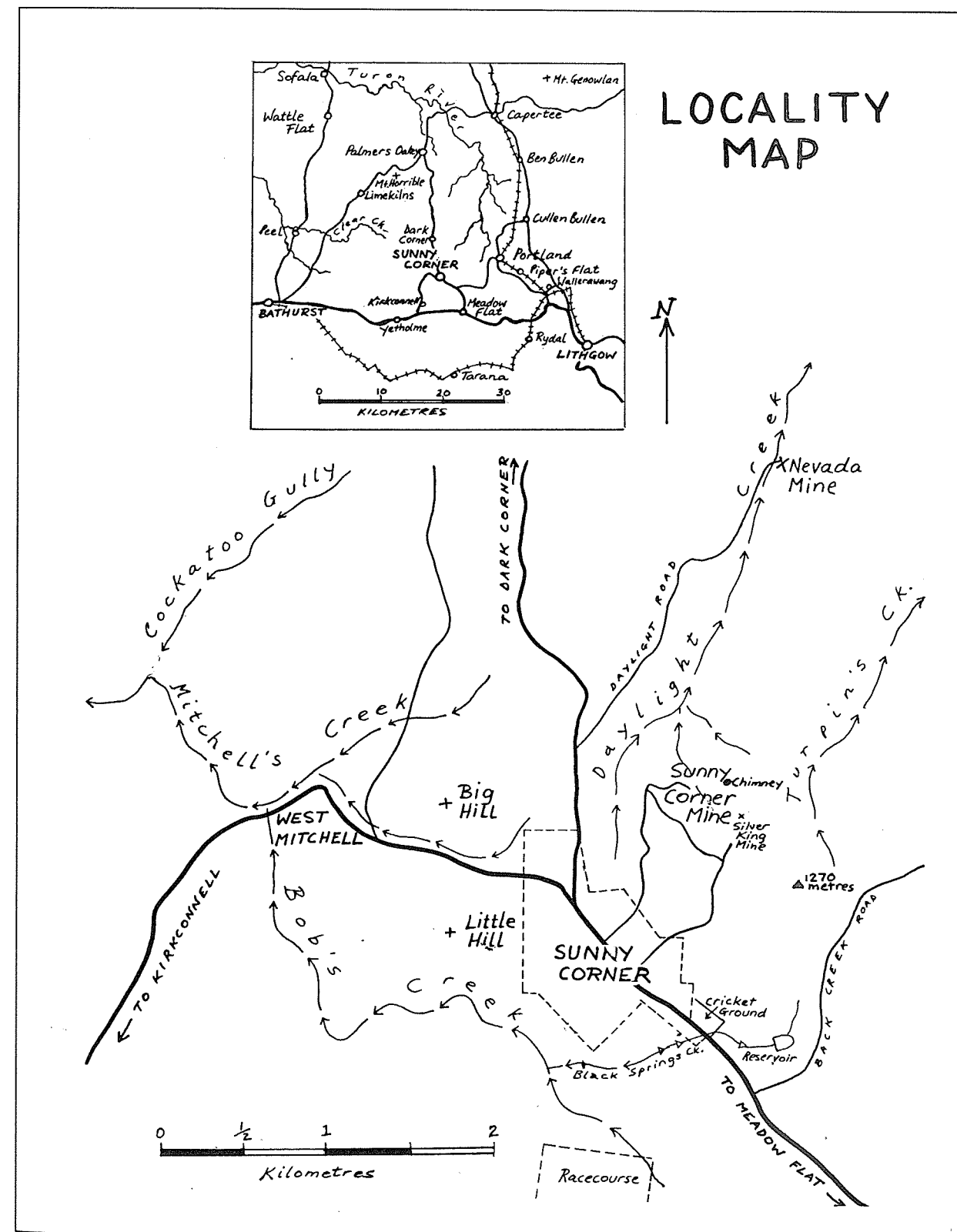
The decimal system of measurement came into general use in 1966. In this book many measurements are given using the old imperial system – measurements such as miles, feet and inches, pounds (weight), acres, gallons and so on.

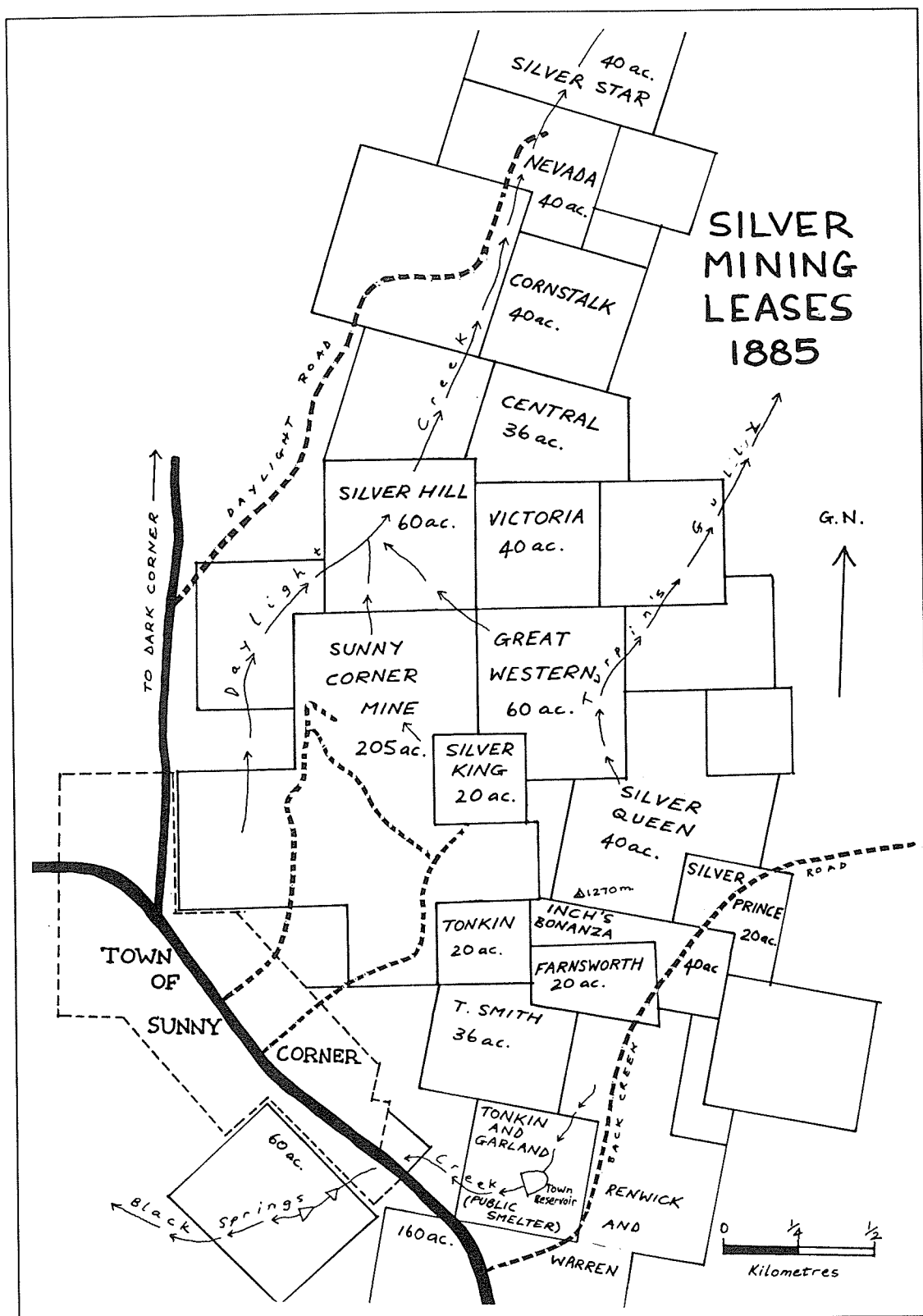
As a general rule, these imperial measurements have been retained in all cases where the original source material had used the imperial system.

Pounds, shillings and pence conversions have been explained within the text where appropriate.

The following short conversion table may be useful.

£1 (20 shillings)	= \$2
1 mile	= 1.6 kilometres
1 acre	= 0.4 hectares
1 pennyweight	= 1.42 grams
1 ounce	= 28.35 grams
1 pound (weight)	= 0.45 kilograms
1 ton	= 1.02 tonnes
1 foot	= 30.48 centimetres
1 yard	= 0.914 metres
1 chain (66 feet)	= 20.119 metres
1 gallon	= 4.546 litres





## PART I – THE MINES

### SUNNY CORNER SILVER MINE

#### *Silver Mixed With Gold*

Gold had been found at Mitchell's Creek during the 1850s and 1860s. From about 1865, gold was also being found in surface quartz in an area which was later to become the Sunny Corner silver mine. Almost twenty years later, it was found that the gold-bearing quartz and gossan at the Sunny Corner mine also contained a large amount of silver. This was to start a silver rush in the district. By 1885 every available piece of ground had been pegged out for miles around.

Optimism ran high and it was thought that a huge silver lode may have extended for many miles to the north and south of Sunny Corner. Leases averaged about 20 acres, and an 1886 map of these leases looks something like a patchwork quilt. There were about thirty different companies and syndicates formed – it was rather like digging into a giant lucky dip – all the mine owners considered that they had a fair chance of sinking their mine onto a portion of the main lode. In reality it turned out that, unlike the vast silver lode at Broken Hill which ran unbroken for miles on end, the silver at Sunny Corner mostly existed only in the area of the main Sunny Corner mine and the smaller adjoining Silver King mine. Smaller outcrops and veins of ore occurred elsewhere, but they were not attached to the Sunny Corner mine's lode. The smaller companies were spurred on by their finds of ore, but were soon to be disappointed by these minor veins of mineral. Speculation was rife and fortunes were won and lost overnight in this lucky dip gamble. The Sunny Corner silver mine was to be the largest of the mines that managed to survive for more than a year or two, and its story is now told.

#### *Beginnings in Gold – 1865-1875*

In about 1865 an area later to become part of the Sunny Corner silver mine was taken up as a gold lease by Dr. McKenzie, a well known Sydney medico at that time. The lease was worked for surface quartz with poor results. Alexander McDonald and party were the first to open cut for quartz in the same vicinity, and they were followed three years later by Messrs. Winters and Morgan.

Winters and Morgan were quite successful in obtaining gold. Their quartz was being carted from the mine at Sunny Corner, to a stamper battery at Mitchell's Creek, some two kilometres distant. Here it was crushed and the gold recovered, but all the silver-rich tailings were washed down the creek; their potential value went unrecognised. Silver mining had not even been considered, and it is doubtful if the existence of a silver lode was even known. An enormous amount of silver must have been wasted in those early years. Winters and Morgan were in effect skimming the cream off the top of the main silver lode at Sunny Corner (and working it for gold alone), without realising what lay beneath them. The open cut mine was worked only to a depth of 10 feet, and the

Department of Mines in 1875 described there being “tens of thousands of tons of quartz in all directions” on the site, available without much labour. This quartz would have consisted of both porous gold-bearing quartz which appeared as a white rock, and also a crumbly brown rock – the silver bearing gossan.

#### *Silver Content Noted – 1876-1878*

In 1876 alluvial mining and crushing were nearly at a standstill for want of water – it was a dry year and the stamper batteries needed plenty of water in order to extract the gold from the crushed rock. Some copper ore was taken to Lithgow for smelting, but did not pay. There was considerable interest being taken in the Winterton Reef of Winters and Morgan, which was described as a splendid lode of pyrites three feet thick. None of it had then been treated.

1877 was the Year of Recognition – the first official noting of the silver content in the ore at Sunny Corner appeared in the Department of Mines Annual Report for that year. But not much action resulted from this. By now Winters and Morgan had erected a 10 stamper battery on their claim, and after crushing the rocks for their gold content, the richly silver-bearing residue was at least being run into a tailings heap at the mine site, rather than being washed down Mitchell’s Creek. Morgan’s Claim (formerly Winters’ and Morgan’s Claim) showed four distinct lodes, gold and silver, lead, copper and pyrites, according to the report. Morgan was working the mine for gold, but in the opinion of the Mining Registrar, would have done better to work the mine for silver, to thus better extract the gold and not waste the silver.

Despite this neglect of the silver, it was estimated that Winters and Morgan had, up to this time, obtained some £30,000 worth of gold from the mine at Sunny Corner. The same amount of gold today would be worth \$5 million. (This estimate takes the 1870s gold value at £3 an ounce, and the 1988-9 value at \$500 an ounce.)

It is therefore puzzling to learn, as one pieces together the fragments of information found in various old newspaper reports and mining records, that Winters and Morgan handed over their claim in 1878 to a small group of miners once employed by them, in lieu of wages owing.

These miners had some small success, but finally abandoned the claim, which was subsequently forfeited.

Presumably the Winters and Morgan lease was the one which appears on old maps as GL 1, or Gold Lease 1, a lease of 25 acres which was to become the main mining lease of the Sunny Corner Silver Mining Company.

In 1884 Winters and Morgan and some others were to make an attempt to jump the claim of the Sunny Corner mine in an effort to regain a portion of the silver-rich tailings that they had left behind.

#### *Shepherd and Hurley – 1879-1881*

Messrs. Shepherd and Hurley took over the former Winters and Morgan Claim, and purchased at valuation the machinery and working appliances left by Winters and Morgan. Mr. John Hurley and his brother Mr. William Hurley pegged their claim on 22nd March, 1879, with the financial

backing of Mr. John Shepherd, a Sydney solicitor. The Hurley’s apparently had difficulty obtaining labour locally, so, in order to comply with the labour conditions of their lease, were obliged to hire a Cobb & Co. coach in Sydney (which they drove themselves), and conveyed workmen from Sydney to the workings at Sunny Corner.

Mr. Shepherd invested much money in the workings, with little return. The mine was at that time being worked only for gold, and they did not realise the value of the silver. They worked on a shaft begun by Winters and Morgan, in their search for gold. Eventually they sank another shaft, and thus came upon the main silver lode, which they then never lost sight of.

It occurred to Mr. Shepherd to have assays of the ore made, so in 1881 the lode material was sampled by Mr. H.Y.L. Brown, the Government Geological Surveyor, and was found to have a high silver content. Considerable work was done at this time by Shepherd and Hurley. By 1881 they had worked to a depth of 500 feet. This was reported by the Department of Mines, and may refer to the main shaft of the Sunny Corner mine, which would have reached approximately 500 feet to the lowest level.

During 1880-1881, adjoining leases were taken up by Newton Brothers and Co., and Bensusan and Co. The Newton’s were working the quartz for gold, but they also had some good indications of silver. Bensusan & Co. had installed machinery of considerable value in order to extract the gold from the silver. The Hurley’s had ordered machinery from England with which to treat the silver at Sunny Corner. These types of machinery would have been of the type used in the amalgamation process, whereby the ore is crushed to powder and treated with mercury in order to separate out the silver and gold.

There must have been a lot of discussion amongst all these men regarding their finds of silver and the possible methods of treating it. In Australia at that time there was very little knowledge on this subject. Silver was not greatly valued, due to the fact that it required expensive and very complicated treatment in order to separate out pure silver, and even if this could be achieved, the silver was still worth a lot less than gold. Gold on the other hand, could be picked up as pure nuggets by a novice, and even to obtain it from crushed quartz was a simple enough process. Copper and lead could be smelted in a simple blast furnace, but silver ore was a much more complex substance and difficult to treat.

The Newton’s, the Hurley’s, Bensusan and John Shepherd also discussed the possibility of combining their resources to form a syndicate or a company. But how best to treat the ore? It was a real dilemma.

#### *By Steamship to London and America – 1881-1883*

John Shepherd decided to ship a large quantity of silver ore to England for processing. John Hurley accompanied the ore to London. It was processed and it paid well, but the transportation costs ate into the profits. If ore was to be shipped overseas on a regular basis, only a small profit would ever result. The ore had to be carted by horse or bullock team to Rydal, carried by train over the mountains to Sydney, then shipped to England, a costly



exercise. John Hurley also tried to find financial backers in London who might be willing to invest in the silver mine at Sunny Corner, but he was unsuccessful.

While in England, John Hurley was offered the job as manager of an English mine in Queensland, which he accepted. He returned home by steamer, via America, and it was in America that he took samples of Sunny Corner silver ore to silver mining experts in Nevada, for assessment. Nevada was at that time, world famous for its silver mines.

On the steamer home from San Francisco, John Hurley met up with a Mr. Charles Kahlo, an American experienced in silver smelting techniques.

The two men discussed the feasibility of silver smelting in Australia, where up until that time it had never been attempted. At the big American mines, the amalgamation process had been used in the 1860s to treat the rich deposits of silver ore, but since that time, water-jacket and air-blast smelters had been invented and were being used with great success.

If this could be done in America, well why not at Sunny Corner?

Upon their arrival in Sydney, John Hurley and Charles Kahlo attempted to find financial backers. The Sunny Corner mine was now £4,000 in arrears. Mr. John Newton invested £3,000, but the full amount of investment capital needed was not forthcoming. John Hurley pressed and begged his friends to invest in the mine, but to no avail. He then went to Queensland to take up his position as manager of the English mine there, and sold his interests in the Sunny Corner mine so that he could speculate in Queensland.

#### *The American Connection*

People in Australia who were supposed to be knowledgeable in mining matters condemned the Sunny Corner mine as being worthless. Undaunted, Mr. Kahlo sent 10 tons of silver ore from Sunny Corner to his colleague and friend, Mr. John D. La Monte, who was the president of a large association in America and very experienced in silver mining and silver smelting techniques. Mr. La Monte had even invented an improved type of water-jacket furnace, which was being used for silver smelting in America. John La Monte was impressed with the sample of Sunny Corner ore, it had been smelted and produced 95 per cent of its silver content, which was considered an excellent result. He then wrote to Charles Kahlo, saying that if there was sufficient quantity of this ore, he would personally come out to Australia and build one of his smelters at Sunny Corner on a try-before-you-buy plan. The reply was sent back – there was “an incalculable amount of ore” at Sunny Corner. So La Monte resigned his job in America, and with a vision of pioneering enterprise and large profits, he set sail for Australia.

John La Monte and Charles Kahlo formed their own company, the New South Wales and Queensland Manufacturing Company, with the intention of supplying silver smelting machinery and know-how to the Australians. It was planned that all machinery and plant for smelting would be manufactured “in the colonies”, (i.e., Australia).

Such was their confidence in the Sunny Corner mine, that they undertook to install a smelting furnace on that site, at their own cost and risk, and to receive no payment until the first bullion was run out of the smelter. They

planned to expend £4,700 to demonstrate the smelting process at Sunny Corner. If successful, this amount would be returned to them by the Sunny Corner company, with £2,500 payable out of the first £5,000 worth of bullion, and the balance after three months of continuous and successful smelting, with a guarantee that the smelting of the ore would yield at least 95 per cent of its bullion content. As interest on their investment, the Americans also would claim a royalty for the next three years, being four shillings per ton of ore smelted.

With this excellent no-risk offer from the Americans, two major obstacles had been overcome. Here was a guaranteed method for treating the silver ore, and at the same time, La Monte and Kahlo would become, in effect, the long sought after financial backers for the Sunny Corner mine.

#### *Formation of the Sunny Corner Silver Mining Company – 1884*

By May, 1884, the Sunny Corner Silver Mining Company had been formed, and they were financial after issuing 64,000 shares at £1 each. This gave the company a working capital of £64,000 with which to develop the mine. Three of the directors were John Newton, John Shepherd and S.L. Bensusan, who were the original leaseholders at Sunny Corner. They had obviously decided to join forces. William Hurley was now the mining manager for the company, and John Hurley, having sold his share in Sunny Corner, was a mine manager in Queensland. Yet another Hurley, George, was to become the first mine manager of the adjoining Silver King mine. This mine was originally opened up by John Shepherd and John Hurley as a gold mine in 1882, but late in 1884 they sold their interest to another syndicate which formed the Silver King Mining Company.

The Sunny Corner company decided to accept the proposal put to them by La Monte and Kahlo, and in addition they planned to purchase a smaller Pacific smelter and install it themselves. The prospects of the company were now excellent.

#### *Building the Smelters*

Mr. La Monte described his first visit to Sunny Corner. This was at the beginning of 1884. The mine was barely paying expenses, he said. There were only a very few men employed, a five-stamp battery was in use. There was no township and no inhabitants; the country was in fact a wilderness. But he had been most interested in the tailings heap at the mine – there was some 15,000 tons or more – the residue from numerous crushings for gold. There was a high silver content left in these tailings, and Mr. La Monte knew just how to extract this silver. He brought with him a team of American experts to build a 60-ton capacity Probert smelting furnace, as specified in his contract with the Sunny Corner company. Work was begun.

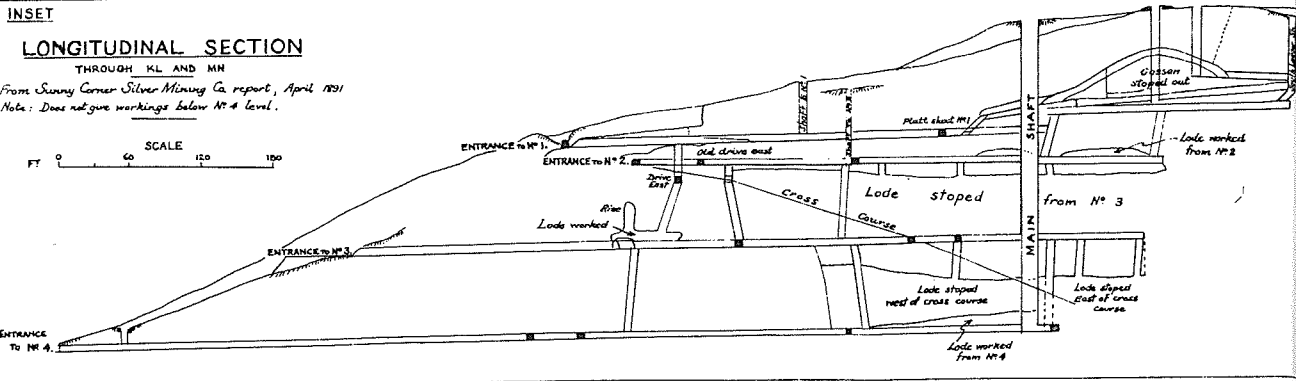
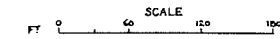
Meanwhile, the Sunny Corner company had imported a Pacific 20-ton capacity water-jacket furnace from San Francisco, complete with boiler, pump engines, blower, slag pots, moulds etc. This had been shipped to Sydney, brought by train to Rydal and carted piece by piece on bullock wagons to Sunny Corner. They attempted to assemble this without the

INSET

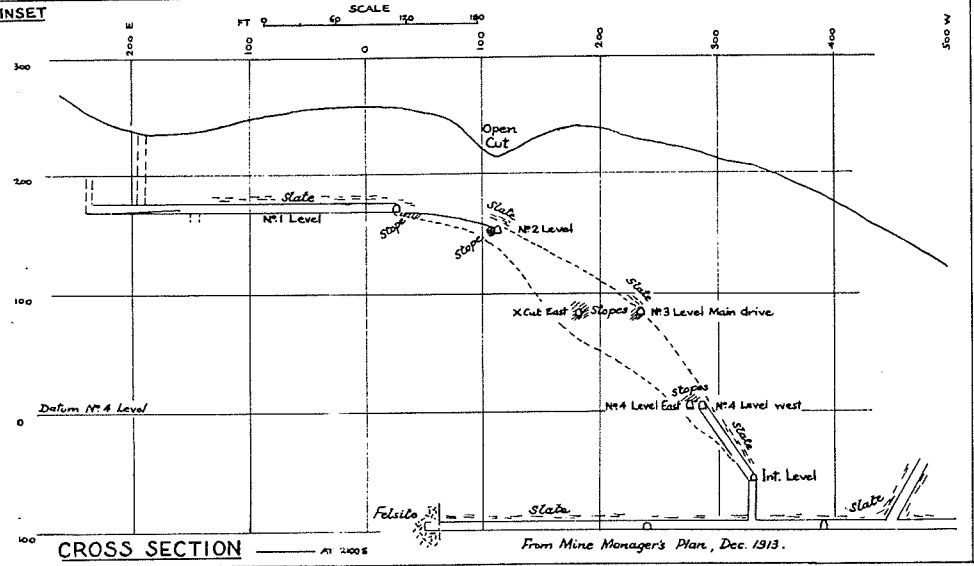
LONGITUDINAL SECTION

THROUGH KL AND MN

From Sunny Corner Silver Mining Co report, April 1891  
Note: Does not give workings below N° 4 level.



INSET

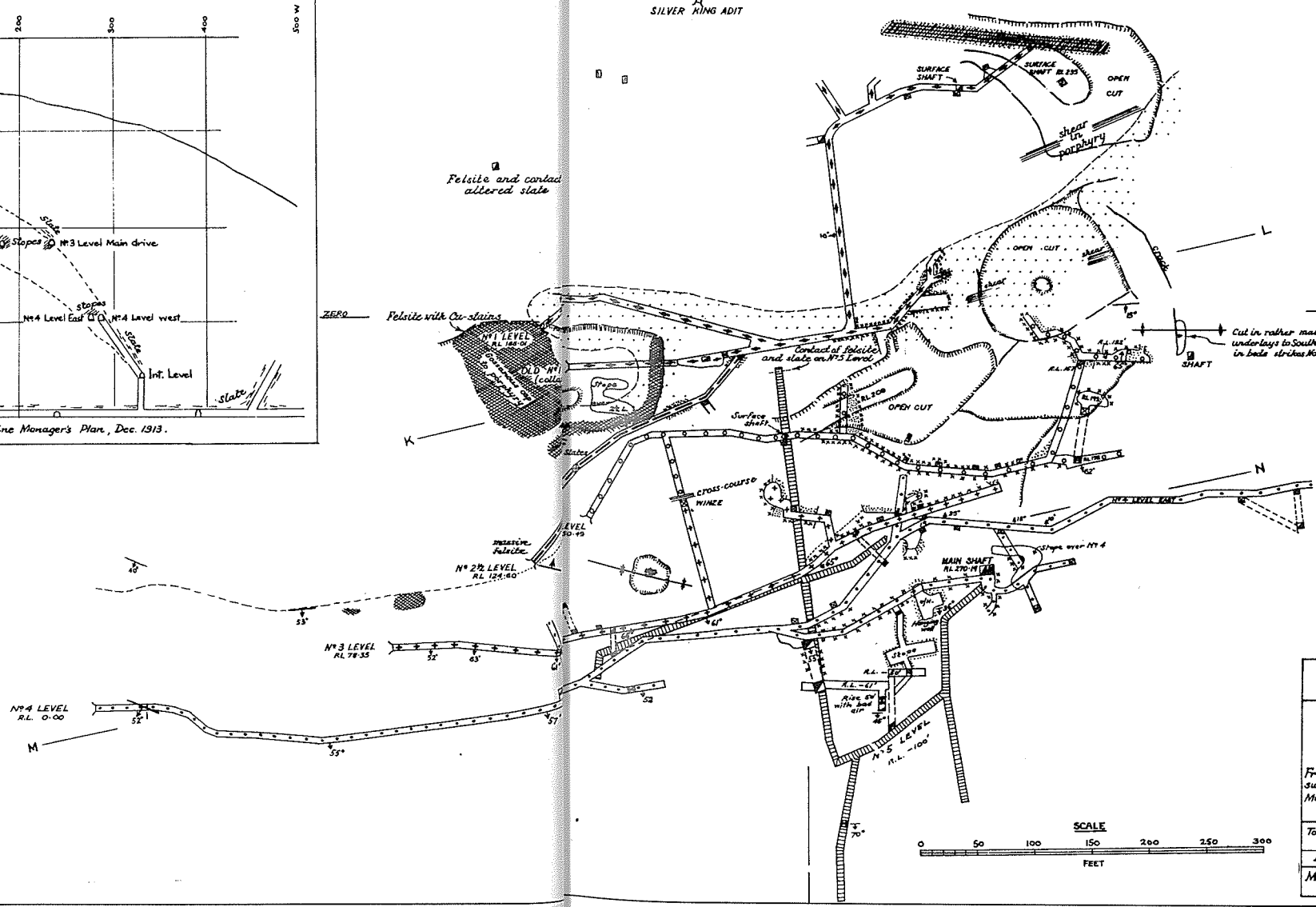


REFERENCE

- Gasson
- N° 1 Level
- N° 2 Level
- N° 2½ Level
- N° 3 Level
- N° 4 Level
- One
- Filled stopes
- N° 5 Level

Plan of Sunny Corner mine showing the extent of the underground workings in 1891 (date of map 1913).

SILVER KING ADIT



N.S.W. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY  
DEPT. OF MINES

**SUNNY CORNER MINE**

COMPOSITE LEVEL PLAN

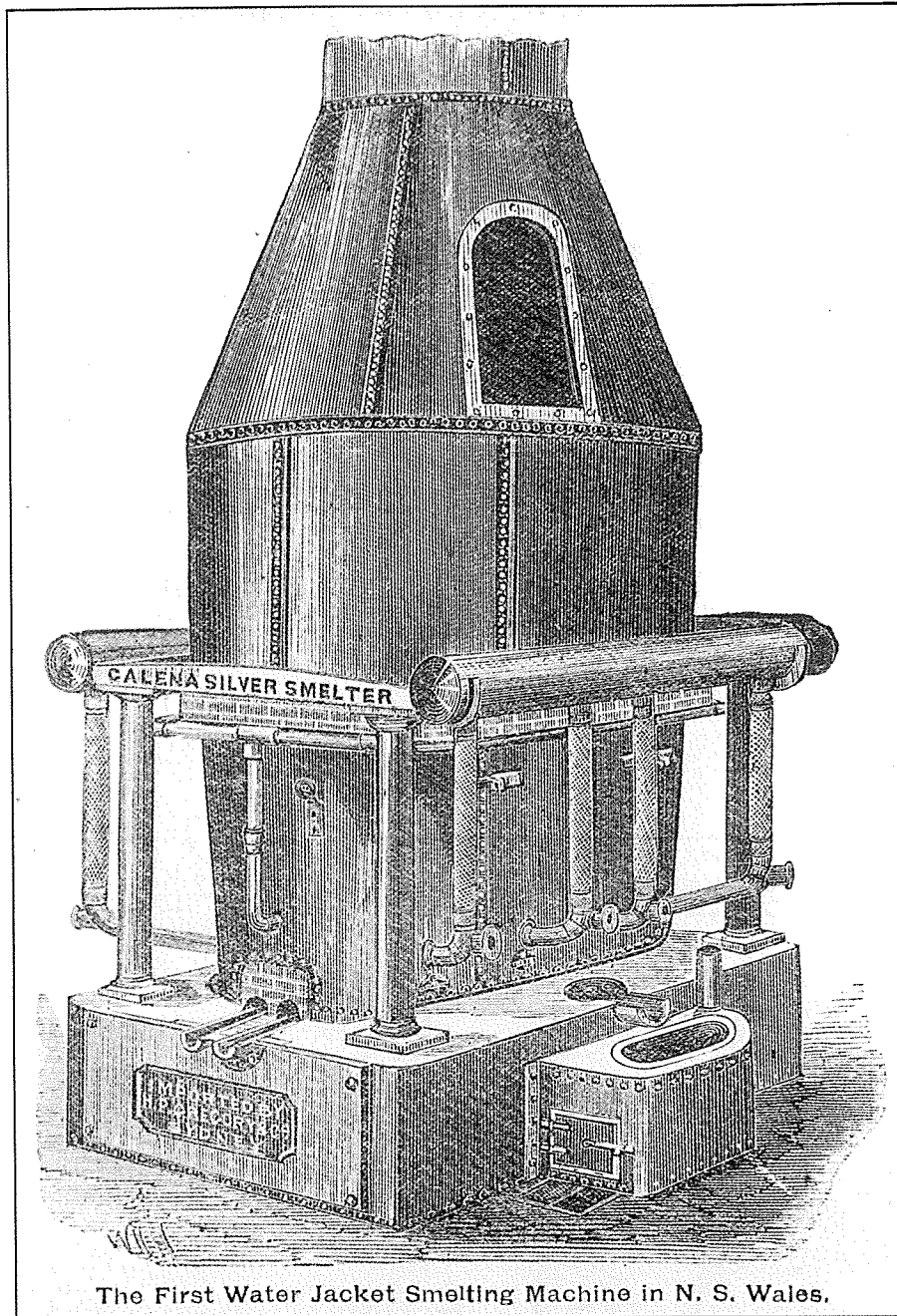
From mine manager's plan, Dec 1913, with some surface additions. Plan and sections from Mines Inspection Branch mine record N° 106.

To accompany report by *E. J. Rayner*  
Drawn by *J. L. Lloyd*

Map Reference N° 776

27.3.52

**B15**

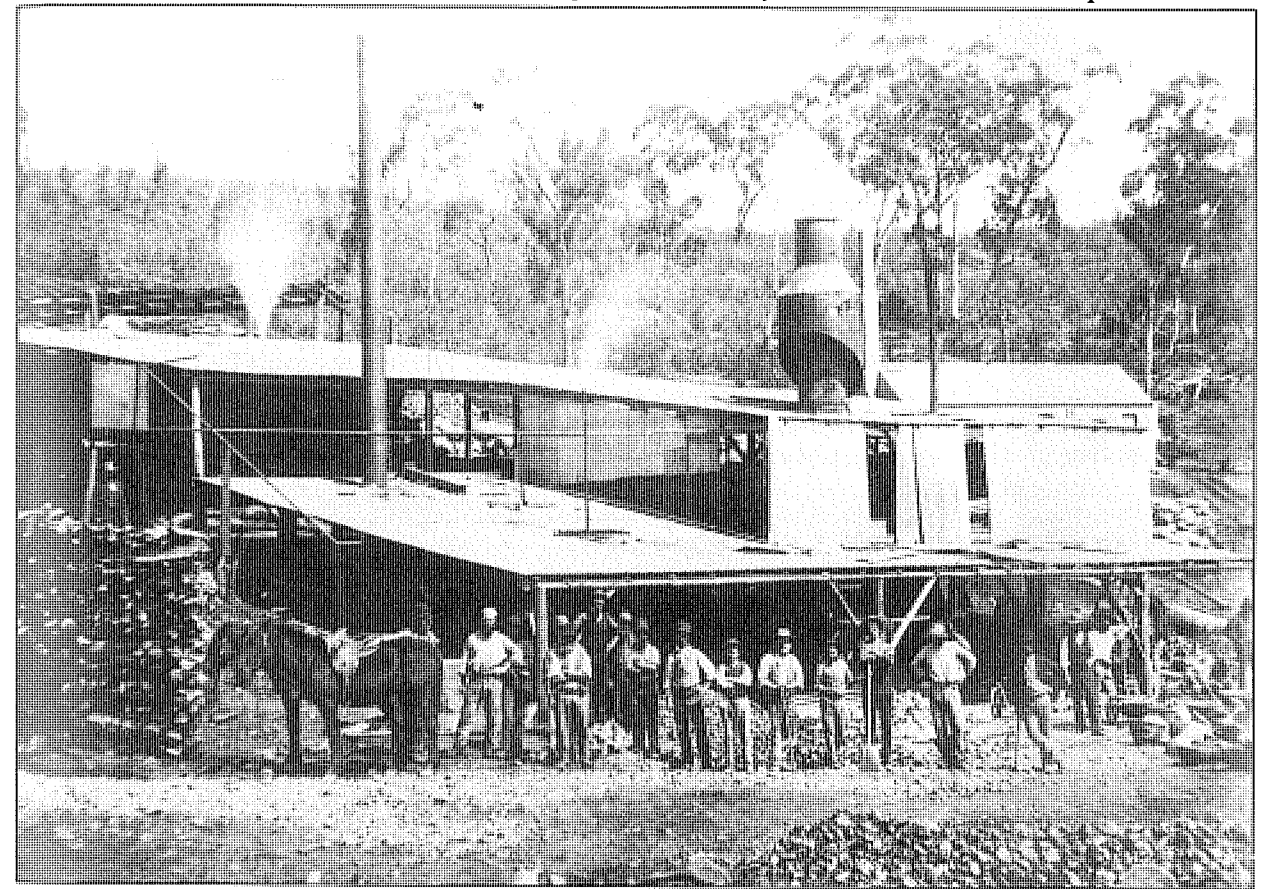


The First Water Jacket Smelting Machine in N. S. Wales.

The Pacific silver smelter – the Sunny Corner Mining Company's first smelter which was imported from San Francisco. It was put in blast for the first time on 27th August, 1884 at Sunny Corner. This was the first time that silver had been successfully smelted in Australia. Photo: *Town and Country Journal*, 13.9.1884

aid of the Americans, who were busy assembling the larger Probert. After some considerable difficulties, they sought the assistance of the Americans, who were of course only too happy to oblige. Work was temporarily stopped on the Probert and the men began to work day and night on the Pacific, connecting up the boiler, steam engines and blowers, all of which were housed in a huge four-storey shed. The mine workings too, had been greatly extended, with miles of tunnelling completed and tramlines running in all directions. A brick assay office was almost completed – this

housed smaller furnaces which were used to test the mineral content of the ores from various parts of the mine. Two underground reservoirs had been dug, plus a well, to supply water to the furnace and boilers. There were 160 men employed and many were Americans. The town of Sunny Corner was being surveyed, and houses and shops were beginning to appear. It took five months to finish building the Pacific smelter, but at last by the end of August, 1884, every last nut and bolt was in place.



The Pacific smelter and shed, late 1884. Photo by Eclipse Photographic Company, courtesy Martin family, Dark Corner

### *First Silver Smelting Works in Australia*

Despite the great show of confidence by the Americans, it seems they were a little nervous about the outcome of the first lighting of the furnace. No grand opening ceremony was planned for this historic event, and two newspaper reports of the time are in dispute as to whether even the directors of the company were present or not. "How nice we would have looked if anything had gone wrong!" the Americans said later, when the news of the highly successful first smelting was being hailed as "a gigantic leap forward in the mining development of New South Wales".

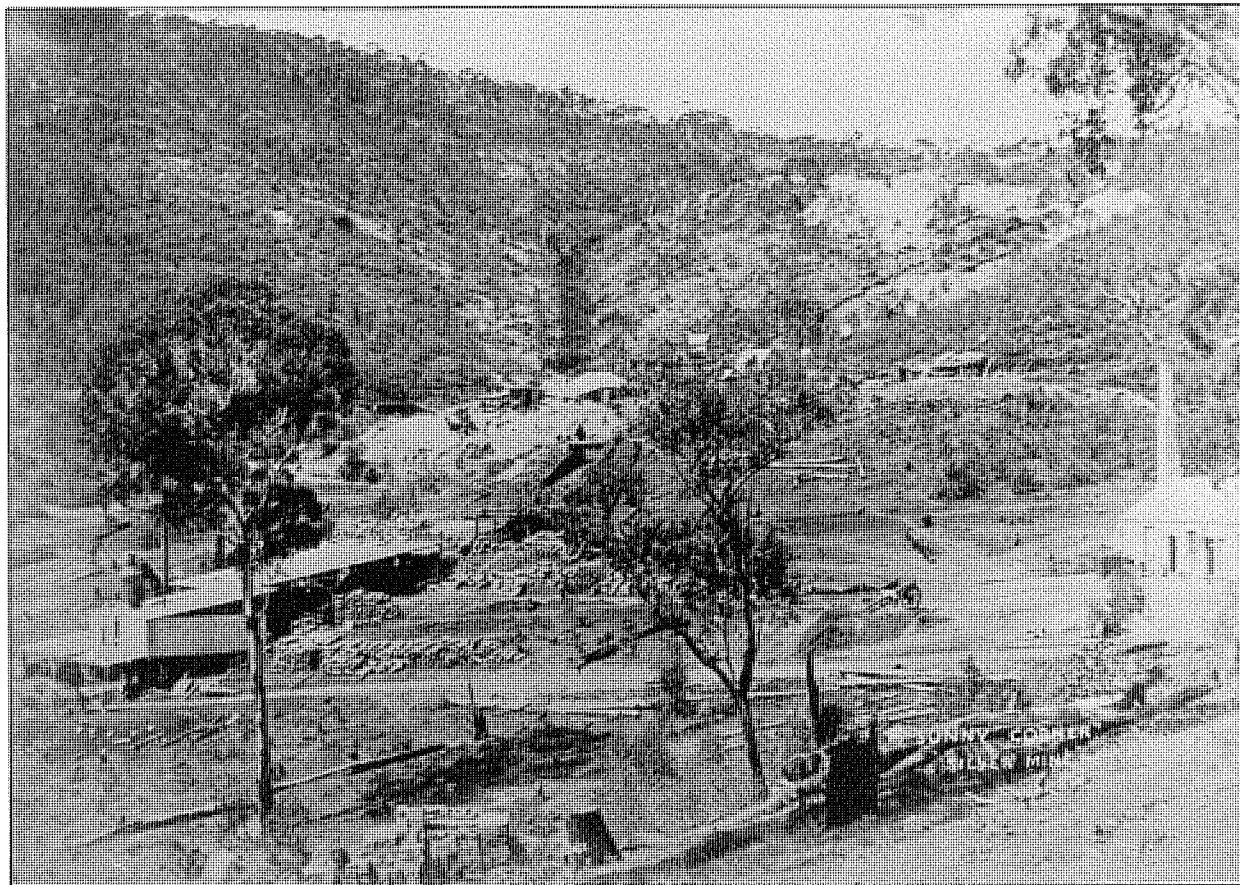
Two descriptive accounts of this first smelting are now given: *Sydney Daily Telegraph*, undated, but end of August, 1884 (the same article, edited, appeared in Silverton's *Silver Age* newspaper on 27th September, 1885).

Day and night has been occupied in the erection of the present works, and although nearly every artisan claimed that he never had a doubt of



failure but was certain of success, the circumstances attending the starting of the works showed an individual and collective anxiety of mind of all concerned. As soon as the last nut was placed on the last screw, and the last lathe on the wheel, the furnace fire was lighted. It was 10 minutes past 2 on Wednesday morning last. No christening ceremony was indulged in, and the presence of the directors did not grace or distinguish the scene for they were not invited. 'How nice we would have looked if anything had gone wrong!' was the explanation given by the enthusiastic artisans whose mind, according to a previous statement had never been disturbed by even momentary fear of failure. Within an hour of starting the furnace the slag came away from the place intended and in the quantity expected, and then the bullion ran out in due time and place. Everybody was jubilant, because everything was working splendidly. Early that morning telegrams were sent to the Sydney directors and shareholders, whose spirits rose proportionately with the shares. No hitch and no stoppage for a moment has taken place. In silver smelting there appears to be no such word as 'stop' if you can help it. Sunday and Monday are alike. The furnace must be kept going and the determination to do this is expressed in the countenance of every smelter at Sunny Corner. The limited number of men skilled in the work necessitates them working 12 hours a day.

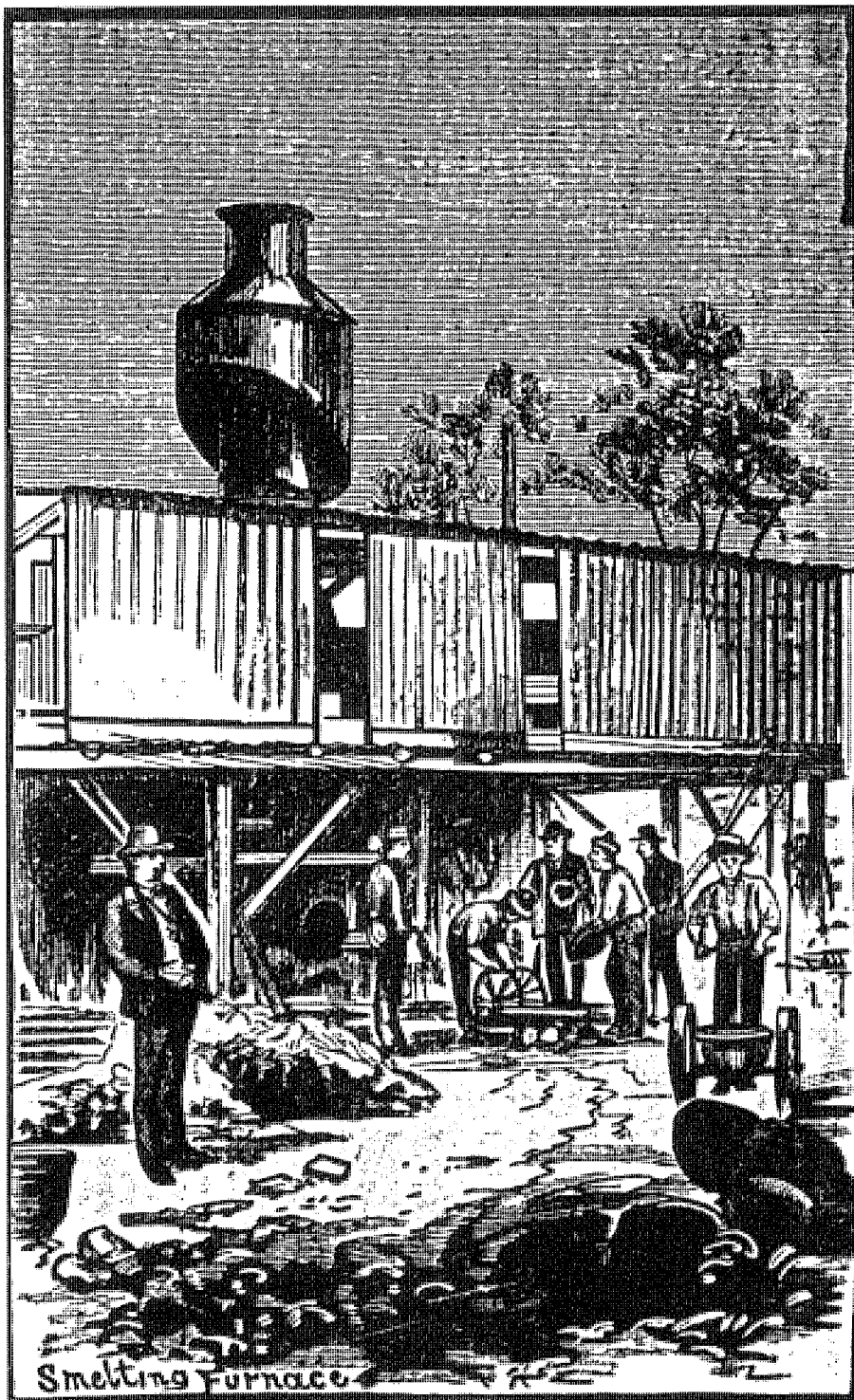
Sunny Corner silver mine, October 1884. The Assay Office is on the right, and the Pacific smelter building is on the left. Note eucalypts on the hillside – these were later killed as a result of fumes from the smelters. Photo courtesy Mitchell Library, Sydney



*Bathurst Daily Times*, Friday 29th August, 1884:

Silver Mining at Mitchell's Creek – The First Smelter at Work (from our special correspondent) – Mitchell's Creek, August 28 – The new era of mining in this colony burst into life, namely, the starting of the Pacific Silver Smelter at Sunny Corner, Mitchell's Creek, on Wednesday morning, at 3 a.m. The time appointed having been kept a secret except to a select few, there were not many present besides the directors of the Company to witness the interesting ceremony, it being the first silver smelter that has worked in the Australian colonies. From early in the previous day, gangs of men were busily engaged in making the finishing strokes, but it was not until 12 o'clock on Tuesday night that the last piece of shafting was in its place, and precisely at 1 o'clock the engine was started, and after a run of an hour and a half, to see that the machinery was correct and in running order, the torch was applied to the cupola, which had been previously prepared with pine wood, coke, etc. Having been allowed a few minutes to catch, the engines were started at full speed, and the blower commenced to revolve. After the blower had made a few revolutions, the tuyers were placed in position [i.e. air hoses], and the real work of silver smelting commenced. The sight that was now before the spectators was something never to be forgotten. As the blower commenced to exert its gigantic powers through the tuyers on the mass of coke, the hum and roaring of the air, and vibration of the machinery made one feel as though some genii were exerting their whole strength to move the mountain side. A most interesting performance was now gone through, by a process known as blowing out the gas. The matter is one that will remain vividly impressed on the minds of all who were present, for years to come. At a given signal from Mr. Gafford (the chief constructor), one of the smelter-men opened an aperture in the cupola, and out burst a tongue of lurid flame some 12 to 14 feet in length, which lit up the shed and surrounding hill sides. This continued for about half an hour, when it was announced that the ore had started to run, and the aperture was then stopped. After about an hour the furnace-man wheeled up a slag pot and tapped the slag hole, then out poured a stream of molten metallic slag, throwing out sparks in a shower. This cast a reflection around the shed, and in the gloom of the night made the attendants look like weird giants walking about, the reflection from the molten stuff seeming to add to a person's height. At exactly 10 minutes past 3 the first bar of bullion was run into the receptacle, and then run into the moulds by Mr. Hurley and Mr. La Monte. Before daylight a dozen bars had been run, each weighing 1 hundredweight [51 kilograms]. The whole of the smelting operations were carried on under the management of Mr. Sterne, Mr. Gafford and Mr. J.M. Smith and the result proves that they are the right men in the right place. The furnace will run now for about a month without stopping. The treating of silver ores in the colony may now be considered to have been successfully performed, doing away with the expense of shipping ore to England.

The skill in silver smelting lay in the using of the fluxes. Unless fluxes were used, the silver would not separate out from the other minerals in



The Pacific smelting furnace,  
October 1884. Photo: *Town  
and Country Journal*,  
11.10.1884

the ore. These fluxes consisted of limestone and iron; even old scrap iron would do, but the amounts had to be just right. This skill the Americans taught to the Australian smelter-men. With the proper regulation of the fluxes, the process of smelting was then fairly straightforward – the

furnace would be started off with a load of coke, which was brought to a red heat, then the silver ore was added (after having been broken into small pieces). Then the fluxes were added and the furnace fed continually with successive charges of coke, ore and fluxes, and from time to time the molten metal would be allowed to run out from the bottom of the furnace. The lead and silver, being the heaviest, would combine at the very bottom of the molten mass, and this would be run off and poured into large bars usually of 70 pounds (32 kilograms) each, called bullion. Slag was the "rubbish" that remained as molten rock in the furnace, and it was removed from the furnace from a hole slightly higher up. The molten stream of slag was run into large basin-shaped moulds which were then wheeled away and tipped over the edge of the ever-increasing slag heap.

The water-jacket furnaces were so called because they were constructed from a double wall of iron plates, all bolted together. Thus the furnace had hollow walls, and cool water was kept in constant circulation inside these walls, or water-jackets, so that the furnace itself would not melt along with its contents.

The silver-lead bullion was further refined in a cupelling furnace. Large containers were made from rammed bone-ash – these were called cupels. The bullion was placed in a cupel and heated until the bullion melted. The bone ash absorbed the lead, leaving only the silver and some gold. The final refining process was done in heat-resistant plumbago crucibles. The almost pure silver was placed into the crucibles, heated in small furnaces, the scum of impurities would rise to the top and be skimmed off, and the pure silver would be poured into ingots, and then sold.

The silver from the Sunny Corner mine then went off in the weekly "escort". The ingots were loaded into a horse-drawn coach which was escorted off by the local police. From Sydney, the silver was then shipped off to London. Some Sunny Corner silver was used by Australian silversmiths, but most of it seems to have gone to England. There were never any recorded hold-ups of the weekly escort of silver, as there often had been with coach-loads of gold. The silver ingots would have been almost impossible to sell, one would imagine, except perhaps to a dishonest silversmith. With stolen gold, a person could say that they had mined it themselves, its origins were impossible to trace. But with the silver ingots which had required so much processing – and with only one mine in Australia at that time refining it – any attempt to try and dispose of twenty bars of stolen silver would have been a foolhardy exercise.

There is ample evidence to suggest that Sunny Corner was indeed the first place in Australia where silver smelting had been done successfully. Newspaper accounts and Department of Mines reports testify to this fact. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 22nd December, 1884:

The completion of the first silver refinery in Australia marks an epoch in the history of silver-mining in these colonies, and especially in New South Wales, which can boast of having lead the way in this very important and necessary branch of the industry. It has remained for the Sunny Corner Company to receive upon its works the first complete set of appliances required for the reduction of silver from its native state to the condition of bankable bullion.

*Sydney Daily Telegraph*, article reprinted in Silverton's *Silver Age* newspaper, 27th September, 1884:

The successful establishment of the first silver smelting works in Australia on the Sunny Corner Gold, Silver and Lead mine, in the vicinity of Mitchell's Creek, is a gigantic leap forward in the mining development of New South Wales. It inaugurates a new colonial industry.

The rich silver discoveries made elsewhere in the colony would now be able to be developed.

Department of Mines Annual Report for 1884, page 35:

The enterprise of the Sunny Corner Company has led to the introduction to this Colony of the furnaces known as the Pacific and Probert smelters, which has proved so great a success that similar furnaces are in course of erection at other mines in that locality, and others are being sent to the Barrier Ranges. These smelters are likely to prove a great boon to the colony in facilitating the development of our vast deposits of galena and other argentiferous [silver bearing] ores, and we are deeply indebted to Messrs. La Monte and Kahlo, not only for introducing these smelters, but also for affording the public so much information concerning the mode of treating the ores, and it is to be hoped their enterprise will be handsomely rewarded.

The silver smelting at Sunny Corner caused a great deal of interest and excitement in mining circles. At that time, ore from Silverton in the Barrier Ranges (near Broken Hill) was being sent to Europe for treatment, and vast deposits of silver-lead were just being discovered in the area of Broken Hill itself. Representatives from Broken Hill Proprietary Company Limited were to visit Sunny Corner in 1885 and inspect the smelters, prior to ordering the first smelters for the new mine at Broken Hill.

The second smelter at Sunny Corner, the Probert, was completed in early December, 1884. It was put into operation successfully and purchased by the Sunny Corner company as per contract some three months later. Shares in the company had risen from £1 to £6, although Mr. La Monte still claimed they were grossly undervalued. The mine and the town were hives of activity, with nearly 600 men being now employed at the mine, and the town population of 2,000 was still growing steadily.

The smelters hummed and puffed and the silver flowed rich and abundant. There was a state of feverish excitement as new claims were pegged out and other companies formed. Four more smelters were planned for the Sunny Corner mine, two for the newly opened Silver King mine and another for the Nevada mine. Numerous bullock and horse teams plied back and forth along the dirt road to Rydal, carting huge quantities of machinery, timber, coke and lime for the mine and supplies for the town. Money flowed as freely as the silver and men were said to have lit their pipes and cigars with £5 notes. By the end of that hectic year of 1884, the Sunny Corner silver mine had produced over a tonne of pure silver and were able to pay handsome dividends to their shareholders.

#### *Broken Hill Comes to Sunny Corner*

After the initial success at Sunny Corner in 1884, many influential visitors came to inspect the new silver smelters.

One such visit was made in December, 1884, when five directors of the Barrier Ranges Silver Mining Company came to Sunny Corner to inspect the La Monte smelters. They were impressed, and ordered a 20-ton capacity silver smelter from Mr. La Monte. This was to be known as the Day Dream smelter and was situated near Silverton. It was put into blast on 6th August, 1885, and another order was then placed for a second smelter of 30-ton capacity.

Another rather historic visit was made in early September, 1885, when William Jamieson (general manager) and Bowes Kelly (director) of B.H.P. came to inspect the smelters at Sunny Corner. The B.H.P. company was just weeks old, it had been officially registered as a company during August 1885 and the directors were anxious to get on with the job. They knew of vast silver-lead deposits at Broken Hill which put the finds at Silverton well into the shade, and a major part in developing these deposits would be to build silver smelters, just like those at Sunny Corner! There were now five smelters in blast at Sunny Corner, all running without a hitch. La Monte had been interviewed by the B.H.P. directors at Broken Hill in July, and they had agreed in principle to ordering two of his patent silver smelters, but they probably thought it just as well to make a personal inspection of the La Monte patent smelters in action at Sunny Corner. Following their inspection, two 25-ton Nevada smelters were ordered by Jamieson and Kelly and the other B.H.P. directors, for the start of Broken Hill's silver smelting operations, and thus was formed an historic link between Sunny Corner and Broken Hill. These first B.H.P. smelters started operating in May, 1886, they were successful and immediately two additional smelters were ordered from La Monte.

It should be pointed out here that the first finds of silver in the Broken Hill (Barrier Ranges) area had been made near Silverton (now a ghost town), some 20 kilometres from the present town of Broken Hill.

Significant finds had been made there in 1882. The very first silver smelter in that locality had been installed at the Pinnacles mine and put in blast on 27th June, 1885. This smelter had been built and installed by La Monte's team of Americans soon after they had completed their three month contract at the Sunny Corner mine. Then the Day Dream smelter near Silverton was built and put into blast in August 1885. Finds of silver at Broken Hill itself were first made in September 1883, and the B.H.P. company was formed from small beginnings in June 1885.

It was not until B.H.P. had installed four of La Monte's patent silver smelters that they decided to import their own American advisors. In July, 1886, William Patton from Nevada became the general manager, and Herman Schlapp from Colorado became the chief metallurgist at B.H.P. Up until that time La Monte seemed to have held the monopoly in the silver smelting advisory business. He had been described in 1885 as the only authority on silver mining in the colony and he had certainly profited from this situation. He was paid off by B.H.P., in July 1886, the sum of £6,000 (worth over \$1 million today). This was in lieu of all future royalties on his four smelters. In addition to this he was receiving royalties from various other smelters. Contracts usually specified a twelve-month period of royalties, after the first three months of guaranteed results. The contract for the 60-ton capacity Probert smelter at Sunny Corner specified



three years of royalties to be paid at the rate of four shillings per ton of ore treated. This could have amounted to some £7,000 (or nearly \$1.5 million today).

Of course sometimes the smelters failed, such as one installed in New Zealand by Mr. La Monte and Mr. Stearnes early in 1886. The ore had been just too difficult to treat, and La Monte had admitted to being over optimistic. Another of La Monte's failures had been the Nevada mine at Sunny Corner.

But in general there was more success than failure and La Monte must have become fabulously wealthy while in Australia.

He was closely connected with two companies, The New South Wales and Queensland Silver Smelting Company (who were reported in the *Bathurst Times*, April 18, 1885, to be "arranging for the erection of silver furnaces in various places in the colonies") – and also the Intercolonial Smelting Company, a Melbourne syndicate in which La Monte held a large interest.

In addition to the royalties from silver smelters, La Monte also indulged in mining speculation, and while in Broken Hill in 1885 he was able to purchase a large number of B.H.P. shares. He had been overwhelmed by the size of the giant silver lode at Broken Hill and said that he had never seen an equal to that lode, not even in America!

La Monte planned to build smelters near Adelaide, and he inspected Port Pirie, Port Augusta and Port Adelaide during 1886. Already there were smelters at Melbourne, built by the Intercolonial Smelting Company (part owned by La Monte). The continuation of Mr. La Monte's story would require much more research, and it seems that no research has been done before on this man.

### *The Americans at Sunny Corner*

John La Monte had brought out many of his fellow Americans to Sunny Corner in 1884. These Americans were later to go elsewhere in Australia and New Zealand with their smelting technology, but their first job was to complete the Probert smelter at Sunny Corner, and to run it for three months.

The Americans at Sunny Corner were described as being in large numbers, and from different parts of America such as Nevada, Arizona, Colorado and California. These were the areas in the west of America known as the Pacific Slope, and it was here that great silver mines had prospered. "The Americans", said the *Bathurst Times*, 11th August, 1884, "appear to be a very superior class, and among them may be found even men who have obtained their university degrees." But they were also regarded with some suspicion by the locals, especially as they were receiving much higher wages. Many of the silver mines around Sunny Corner took on American sounding names or were named after American mines e.g. the Great Western, the Nevada, and the so-named Cornstalk. My theory here is that the famous Comstock mine in America, when the name is pronounced by an American, sounds like "Cornstalk", and so was named the Sunny Corner Cornstalk mine.

Some notable Americans at Sunny Corner were:

Mr. J.H. Stearnes, who was in charge of the construction of the Pacific and Probert smelting furnaces at Sunny Corner, and was said to have been "singularly free from the 'blowing' propensities with which his countrymen are popularly credited" – (*Bathurst Times*, 23rd August, 1884). He was described as being an expert in the silver line, having carried on the celebrated Melrose Works near San Francisco, California. After leaving Sunny Corner, he successfully started up a water-jacket smelter in Ravenswood, North Queensland early in 1885, then in August 1885 he went on to Silvertown to be the general manager on the Barrier Range of the Intercolonial Smelting Company's business, i.e., in charge of the construction and running of a number of Mr. La Monte's patent smelters. This company was the proprietor of La Monte's patent. Stearnes was responsible for the first successful smelting operations of the new B.H.P. smelters in May 1886 and his skills were held in high regard by the B.H.P. directors.

Mr. Taylor was the furnaceman at Sunny Corner in 1884. In April, 1885, he went to Silvertown where he was to be in charge of smelting operations at the Pinnacles mine, where the first of a number of La Monte patent smelters in that area was put into blast for the first time on 27th June 1885. Mr. Taylor was described as an experienced Californian smelter.

Mr. E. Mynott was the silver refiner at Sunny Corner in 1884. He joined the team at the Silver King mine (Sunny Corner) in 1885, and he returned to America in July 1886. He had, for some fifteen years, been engaged as a silver refiner in the most famous silver mines of America, especially in Colorado.

Mr. Anderson, furnaceman at Sunny Corner, 1884. Later in charge of running the furnaces at the Silver King mine in 1885.

Mr. J.B. Gafford helped to construct the Probert smelter at Sunny Corner in 1884. Later he co-designed the first smelters used by the Silver King mine, and was in charge of their construction and running in 1885-6. After his smelter design had been accepted by the Silver King mine owners, Gafford visited the Broken Hill area in August 1885, in an attempt to sell some of his patent furnaces, but he was unsuccessful, as the preferred furnaces were of the La Monte patent.

Mr. A.E. Hogue was a co-designer of this furnace which had an extended water-jacket; they were known as Gafford and Hogue patent. They worked successfully at the Silver King mine. Gafford resigned from the Silver King in May 1886 after finishing his contract there.

All of these men had originally come out from America as part of La Monte's team, and those just mentioned were all well qualified, but there were also many other Americans at Sunny Corner and some of them were apparently not well qualified at all, although they claimed to be. Of course when things later went wrong at the Sunny Corner silver mines, it was the Americans who were blamed. A spiteful report was made in the *Sunny Corner Silver Press* and was reprinted in Silvertown's *Silver Age* on 15th September, 1886:

The Americans were sent out to Australia without even knowing what class of ore they had to treat. They had all been engaged at smelting works in America, but that alone is no recommendation for their smelting abilities, as was proved by the fact that some of them had been

employed only as bricklayers, carpenters, and even one of them was engaged in the capacity of a night watchman... They started a series of most expensive experiments for the purpose of teaching themselves how the ore should be fluxed, and spent in a most reckless manner the capital of the Company in the building of smelting plants which are now only white elephants and eyesores.

The article continued to throw accusations at the Americans. They were blamed for the noxious fumes, spending the company's money, and, for building various items which were doomed to failure. The ore did become more difficult to treat and caused many problems, but this was not altogether the fault of the Americans although they did seem to suffer rather from over-optimism. Still, someone had to take the blame!

This interlude in the history of the Sunny Corner mine has shown how the beginnings of the Sunny Corner silver mine related to the development of other important silver mines in Australia, notably the Broken Hill silver mine during 1884 and 1885. Now to continue with the story of the Sunny Corner silver mine itself.

#### *"Huge mountains filled with precious metal" – 1885*

Eighteen-hundred-and-eighty-five was a boom year for all the silver mines at Sunny Corner. No one really knew then what the extent of the silver deposits might be, and the town was in the grip of silver fever. This was the year when silver mining companies were formed after the sighting

The first row of smelters at Sunny Corner mine, 1885-1888. Photo courtesy Bruce McPhail, Lithgow



of the merest glint of silver, and sometimes even an imaginary one. It was estimated that during a single week in September of that year, £500,000 had been invested by the Sydney public in a whole host of Sunny Corner silver mining companies. This would be something like \$100 million today – and in just one week!

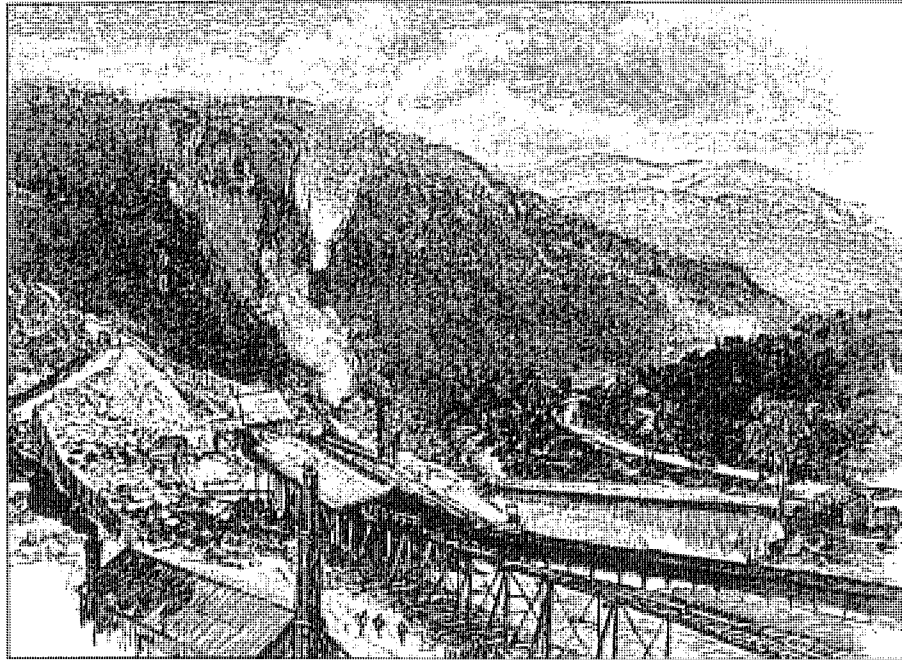
October brought the "Nevada panic", the first bad omen on the Sunny Corner silver field, when John La Monte's own company failed dismally with its first attempt to smelt the ore of the Nevada mine. La Monte had sold out just prior to the smelter being started – he had gone to Broken Hill and blamed someone else for the failure of the smelter. The Nevada Silver Mining Company did struggle to its feet again, but not before causing considerable unrest amongst the owners of silver mines and the investing public.

The Sunny Corner silver mine however, continued at a vigorous pace, and the adjoining Silver King mine was to have its own smelters operating by December of 1885. The silver lode at the Sunny Corner mine was never in doubt, and by the beginning of August 1885 three more Pacific smelters were in blast, making a total of five smelters altogether. A sixth smelter was nearing completion, and a seventh had been ordered. By the end of 1885 the Sunny Corner company had produced some 20 tonnes of pure silver, worth then over £160,000. The same amount of money today would be worth over \$30 million.

There were over 500 men now employed at the Sunny Corner mine, plus many more at all the other mines. The town had boomed along with the mines and had a population of around 4,000 with all amenities, including many hotels. Fumes from the smelters were creating some problems, but amidst all that wealth being created, who would dare to complain too strongly? The townsfolk just painted their iron roofs with red paint, to prevent holes being eaten through the corrugations by the drifting clouds of sulphur, and the miners tried to remember to wash off the lead dust after they finished their shifts, and to cover their mouths when working near the smelters.

A newspaper account in the *Bathurst Free Press and Mining Journal*, 10th October, 1885, described a scene of bustling activity, with the mines developing the long hidden wealth with as much speed as the technology of the day would permit. But this would be nothing to what must follow, said the article, "for the huge mountains are said to be filled with the precious metal", and leases had been taken out for miles around.

But even in this year of fabulous wealth and growth of the Sunny Corner Silver Mining Company, there were murmurings of discontent amongst some of the directors. They were happy with the profits, but not happy with the way the ore was being mined. Up until then, the shafts and tunnels had followed the original gold-mining shafts which were started in the 1870s. In general, the ore that was the easiest to get at was taken out first. But this was beginning to cause problems of ground collapse in the mined areas, and thus made the deeper ore body inaccessible because of the danger of subsidence. (In hindsight, ore extraction would have been much more successful if the deepest parts of the ore body had been mined first.) The directors also considered that the smelters were badly placed; the ore had to be carted too far from the tunnel exits. They



Wood engravings of Sunny Corner mine, 1886. In the larger picture, the assay office is in the foreground, the first row of smelters is to the left, the dam to the right, and a road to the Nevada mine is beyond the dam. A three-railed tramway connected the mine exit with the smelters. Photos: *Illustrated Atlas of Australia, 1886 and 1888*

decided to call in an expert.

Mr. Nicholas was a well known mining expert and consulting examiner from Victoria, and he was asked by the directors to give a comprehensive report on the Sunny Corner mine. He arrived there on 21st October, 1885 and condemned many aspects of the mine workings. Mr. William Hurley, the mine manager, was so offended that he immediately resigned, along with Mr. Gresley Lukin, the legal manager. Hurley had been involved with the Sunny Corner mine since early in 1879, and he was held in high regard by the Sunny Corner community, being regarded as one of the pioneers of the place. Hurley was later to become a local member of parliament, but his resignation from the mine in October 1885 was final despite last minute pleas from some of the directors.

Mr Nicholas was temporarily appointed manager until a new general manager took over. (This was to be Mr. Thomas Eyres, from Victoria.)

Towards the end of 1885, Mr. Nicholas began to sort out some of the problems at the Sunny Corner mine. He organised large quantities of additional timbering underground, moved one of the smelters to a more convenient position and improved the tramway system. These improvements, it was generally agreed, gave the mine a much better outlook for the future.

#### *The Black Mineral and the Sulphide Problem – 1886*

During 1886, a more realistic outlook was taking over from the visions of endless wealth and the heady days of speculation that had occurred during 1885. Silver mining was plain hard work and many of the smaller mines were failing. They had found only insignificant amounts of mineral, and there was no giant lode extending for miles as had first been thought.

The Nevada was still struggling with ore that was difficult to treat. The

Silver King had got off to a good start with its two smelters producing a quarter of a tonne of pure silver in the first month of production in December 1885. It was thought that the Silver King smelters could run for three years without stopping, but after only six months, by June 1886, difficulties were already being encountered with the ore which was becoming more difficult to treat. The smelters were hardly used for the next eighteen months, while experiments were done to find the best method of treating the ore.

This same problem with the ore was beginning to affect the Sunny Corner mine. It was known as the sulphide problem and was encountered at silver mines world-wide, including Broken Hill. As the deeper levels of ore were reached, they became increasingly difficult to smelt, the mineral components could not be separated out. These deep levels contained the sulphide lode. A process was needed to treat the ore from the sulphide lode, and if such a process could be invented and patented, a fortune could be made. Sulphide ore was being stockpiled at silver mines across the world, awaiting new technology.

In the very first years of silver mining at Sunny Corner, direct smelting of the ore had worked most successfully. This would have been the case at other silver mines too. This success was due to the nature of the ore, which came from the upper levels of the ground; the ore was oxidised and was known as gossan. It was a porous, somewhat crumbly rock of a yellowish-brown or rusty colour. When this ore first came about in past geological ages, it would have been shiny and silvery coloured. But for countless thousands of years, the upper layers of the ore lode had been subjected to weathering, and had oxidized. Wherever oxygen had reached the lode, the ore was oxidized. Oxygen seeped down quite a long way, carried by rainwater, and the oxidized layer occurred to a depth of about 30 metres. In the same way that rust will disintegrate iron by weathering, so the minerals which occur naturally in the ground are also affected. This oxidizing process also caused the minerals to become much more concentrated; the slow weathering of the ore had leached out the soluble sulphur and zinc, leaving the lead and silver enriched, and in a form that could be easily smelted. This oxidized ore was easy to get at too, being near the surface. At Sunny Corner, this ore was simply broken up and fed directly into the smelters with no prior treatments, and a small fortune was made while the oxidized ore lasted.

The Americans had shown the men at Sunny Corner how to smelt the oxidized ore – it required a certain amount of skill to know the correct admixtures of the various fluxes such as limestone and iron, which would make the silver run properly. But no amount of skill with fluxes would smelt the black mineral which was just being encountered in the lower layers of the Sunny Corner mine.

This black mineral was part of the sulphide layer, which had been protected from the effects of oxygen by being deep underground. It certainly looked impressive – it glittered with a dark silvery, metallic look, (unlike the dull brown gossan), and was very heavy. This sulphide lode at Sunny Corner consisted of a mixture of minerals, mostly silver-lead-zinc (galena), mixed up with copper and iron pyrites. But this impressive-looking ore mixture proved to be the undoing of many mines, because it

was so difficult to smelt successfully, the silver would not easily separate out from the other minerals.

The zinc especially, caused problems with smelting. None of the zinc could be recovered in a blast furnace, as it tended to fuse with the ironstone in the flux, and became mixed in with the slag and was poured off as waste. A good deal of the lead and silver stayed with the zinc and was also tipped off with the slag.

During 1886 various new types of equipment and furnaces were installed at the mine at Sunny Corner as different methods of pre-treating the ore were tried. Calcining was one such process, and basically consisted of a method of artificial weathering, whereby the ore was pulverized then roasted to a red hot temperature, prior to the smelting process. This had the effect of burning off the zinc and sulphur. Open roasting was also used at Sunny Corner – the ore was simply placed in huge outdoor open kilns, large fires lit underneath the ore, with the result that clouds of sulphur were driven off from the ore.

Another process involved the use of concentrating machinery. The ore would be crushed fine, then subjected to much shaking over flat tables which were designed to separate out the heavier particles, but this process was only partially successful as much silver and lead still remained with the zinc. An amalgamation process using mercury was also tried.

Many years later, when Sunny Corner mine was finished, Broken Hill struggled on with the sulphide problem. One process tried there involved the use of magnets to separate out the minerals. It was not really successful, and the dry and powdery process caused many cases of lead poisoning among the workers.

A successful process was later devised, one of chemical flotation, a process still used today.

In this process the ore is first crushed, then mixed with water and chemicals and stirred mechanically. The mixture then begins to froth, the waste material sinks to the bottom, while the minerals float on the surface. Further chemicals cause the minerals to separate out. These minerals are then filtered and dried before being smelted in furnaces and poured into ingots. This flotation process, developed in the 1920s, solved the sulphide problem which had continued on for so many years and had caused so much heartache and bankruptcy in silver mines.

During 1886, it was becoming obvious to the men at Sunny Corner that running a profitable silver mine was not so simple as was first thought – one needed more than a row of patent smelters to solve the many problems likely to occur with the sulphide lode. Although there was still a fair quantity of the easily smelted oxidized ore available, the Sunny Corner Silver Mining Company began to embark on a program of expensive experimentation in the treatment of the sulphide lode. They knew that a vast deposit of ore lay deep underground that could keep the mine going for countless years if they could find a way to treat it.

The Sunny Corner silver mine was described as “the mainstay of the place” during 1886 when the other mines were beginning to falter. Four hundred men were still employed there, and despite the fact that the smelters were running on and off throughout the year as problems were encountered, the company still managed to produce 15 tonnes of pure

silver worth £120,000, or roughly \$24 million in today’s dollars. Much of this money was ploughed back into the mine, with new equipment. The general public had taken a dim view of the problems at Sunny Corner, and shares in the Sunny Corner company, which had once reached a high of £7 or £8 each during 1885, began to plummet, and by November of 1886 they were down to a low twelve shillings each. Shares in some of the other companies could be bought for a few pence each.

One economy measure taken in August of 1886 led to a strike by the men – their wages had been reduced! Already another strike had taken place during May 1885 and for the same reason. Rates of pay dropped in 1886 as follows:

Furnace feeders	10/- per shift reduced to 9/-
Furnace tappers	8/4 per shift reduced to 8/-
Day labourers	7/6 per shift reduced to 7/-
Refiners	12/- per shift reduced to 11/-

Towards the end of 1886 the *Bathurst Free Press and Mining Journal* reported that hope had not quite fled from the people at Sunny Corner, and with any passing hour or day a different light may be cast – what seems all darkness now may soon show all light, and a gaiety of spirits would then return to the local people.

#### *Families leaving town – 1887*

But the year of 1887 did not bring a different light to the town. Pessimism prevailed, the Americans were blamed and there was an attitude of “I told you so” when things began to go sour. The Sunny Corner mine was the only mine to be worked during that year, they employed just over 200 men and continued to experiment with ways of treating the ore. There were sintering furnaces, fluxing furnaces, roasting furnaces and reverberatory furnaces, open air roasting kilns and amalgamating plants. The difficult sulphide ores were being mixed with the easy oxide ores in experimental smelting. The open roasting of ore made it easier to smelt, and clouds of sulphur and arsenic continued to drift up from the mine as this process took place. Lead laden dust from the inside of the flues was collected and re-treated. There was a lot of head-scratching going on as the “experts” tried to make the mine pay as handsomely as it had done in the past couple of years. With so many miners out of work, families were stealing away in the dead of night, leaving angry storekeepers with unpaid accounts. The town population had dropped from 4,000 to 1,700 by the end of the year.

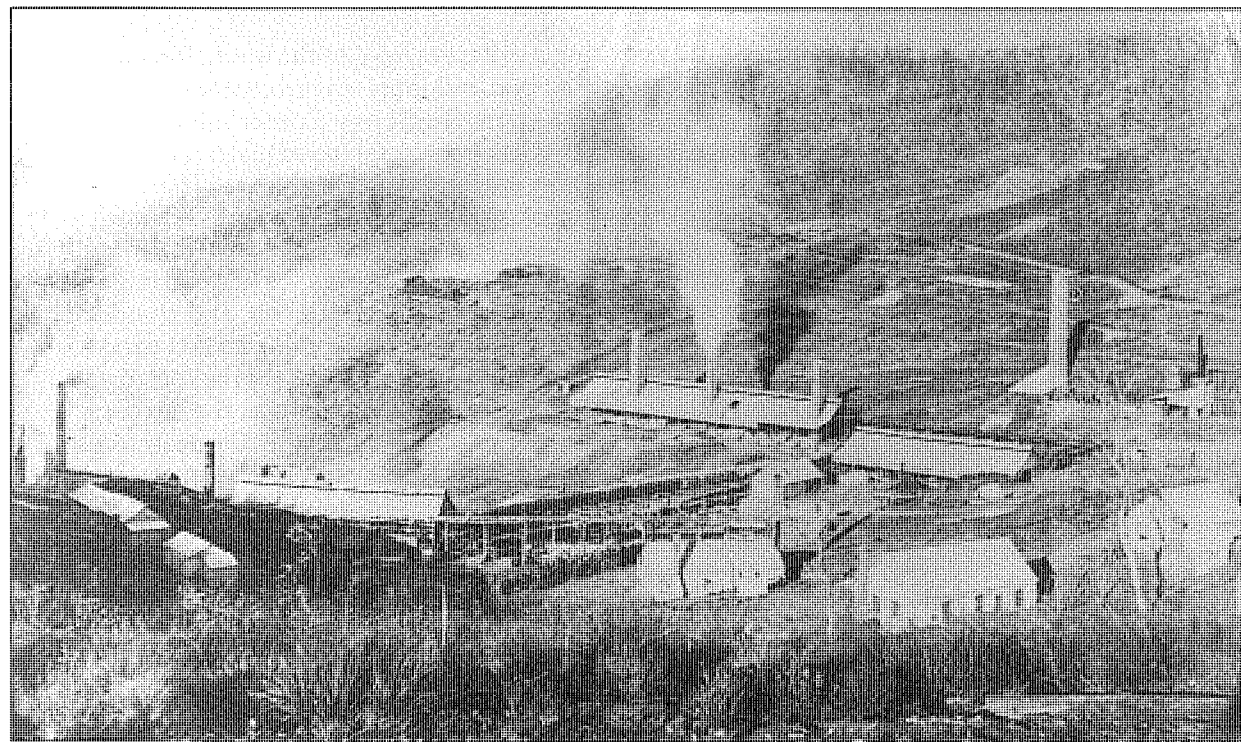
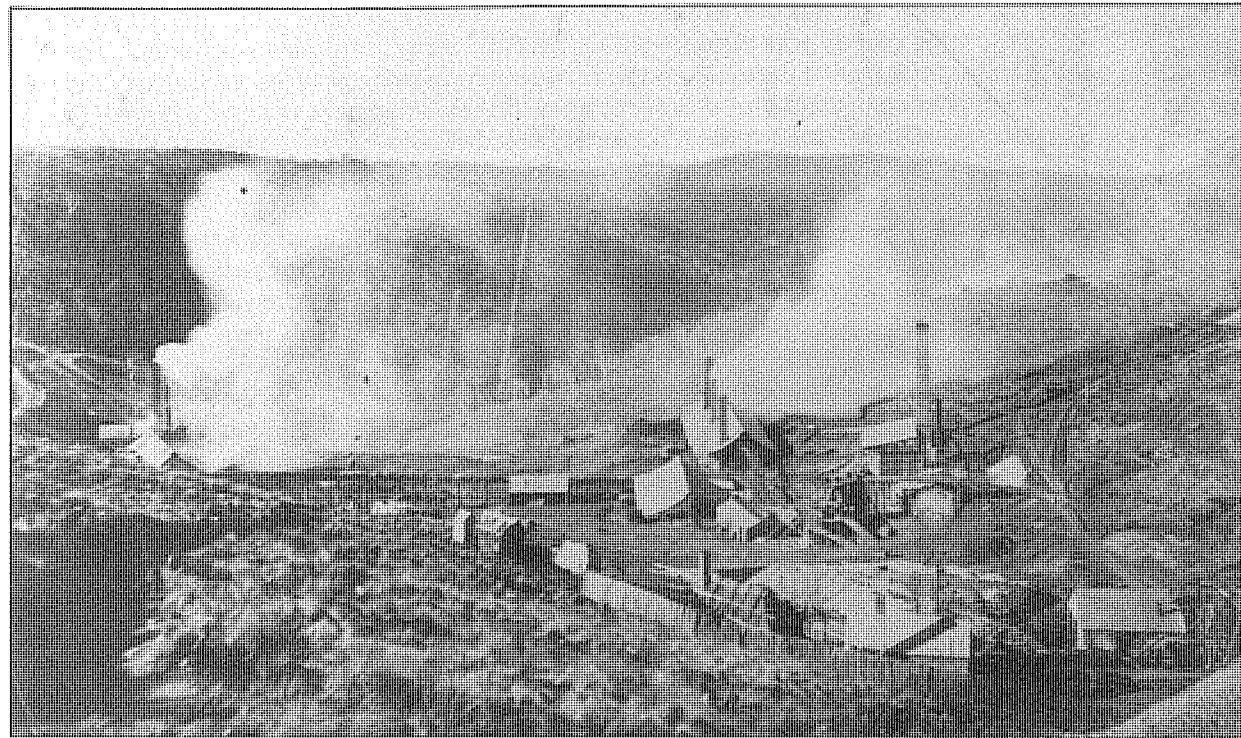
But another 9 tonnes of pure silver had been coaxed from the resistant mine, and lessons were being learned from the ore experiments.

#### *A fresh start – 1888*

The Department of Mines Annual Report for 1888 stated:

Mitchell (Sunny Corner) – This mining centre has taken a fresh start, with every prospect of permanence. During the past year there has been a decided improvement in mining at Sunny Corner, in fact the place appears firmer now than ever it has since it first started.





Two views of the Sunny Corner mine, about 1888. Photos courtesy Bruce McPhail, Lithgow

The Silver King mine was now back at work, employing seventy-seven men, and had solved the earlier problems with the ore simply by deciding to send their partially processed minerals off to England for treatment.



Above: Sunny Corner mine, 1963. Photo courtesy Iris Collins, Sunny Corner

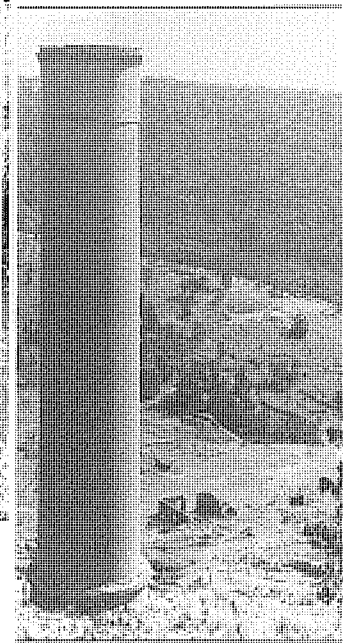
At right: A similar view to that above but taken in 1985 - note spread of pine trees.



The smelters reduced the ore into matte, which was a mixture of silver, gold, copper, zinc, arsenic and lead, and no further attempts were made to extract the silver until the matte reached England.

But the Sunny Corner mine continued to refine its own silver, and some

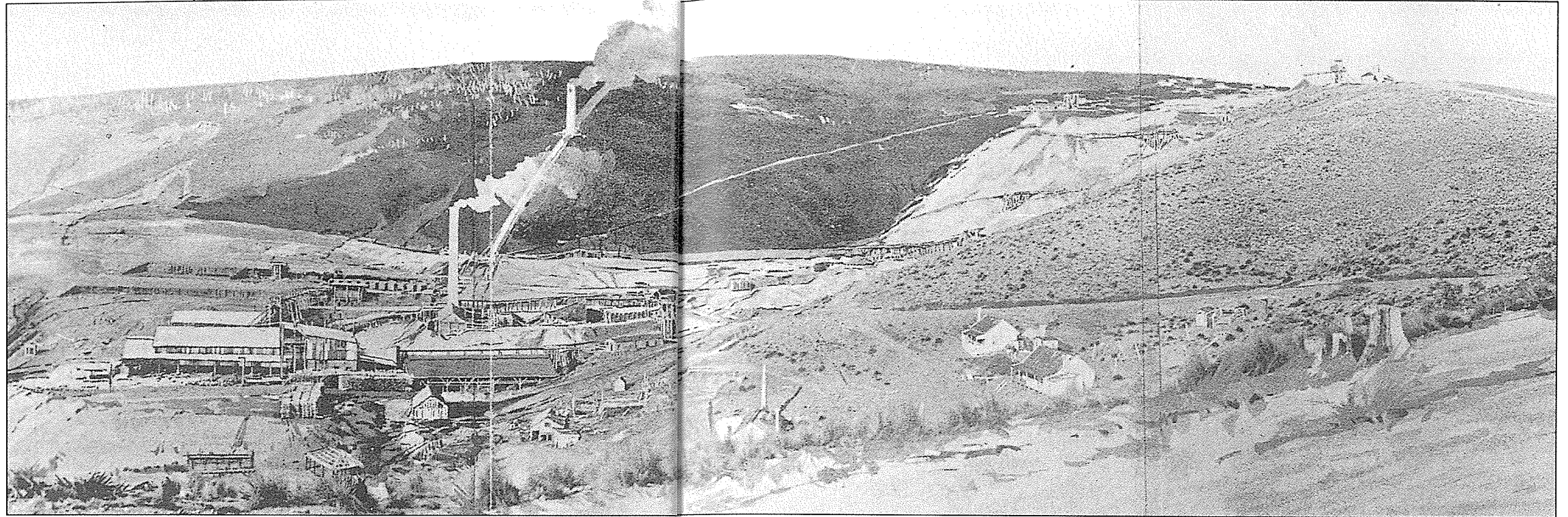




Above: Chimney and boiler-house, 1985.

At right: Panoramic view of Sunny Corner mine showing round chimney complete. This photo was probably taken to commemorate the completion of the new works and the round chimney, in late 1891. The mine closed down in 1892. Photo: "The Copper Mining Industry of N.S.W." Carne, 1899

Facing page: Close-up of cottages as seen in the photo above.



progress had been made with all the experimenting. The black mineral was being successfully treated, and in addition a large quantity of the old slag heaps were re-treated to extract the remaining silver in the waste slag – earlier smelting attempts had sometimes gone wrong, with the silver being tipped out with the slag.

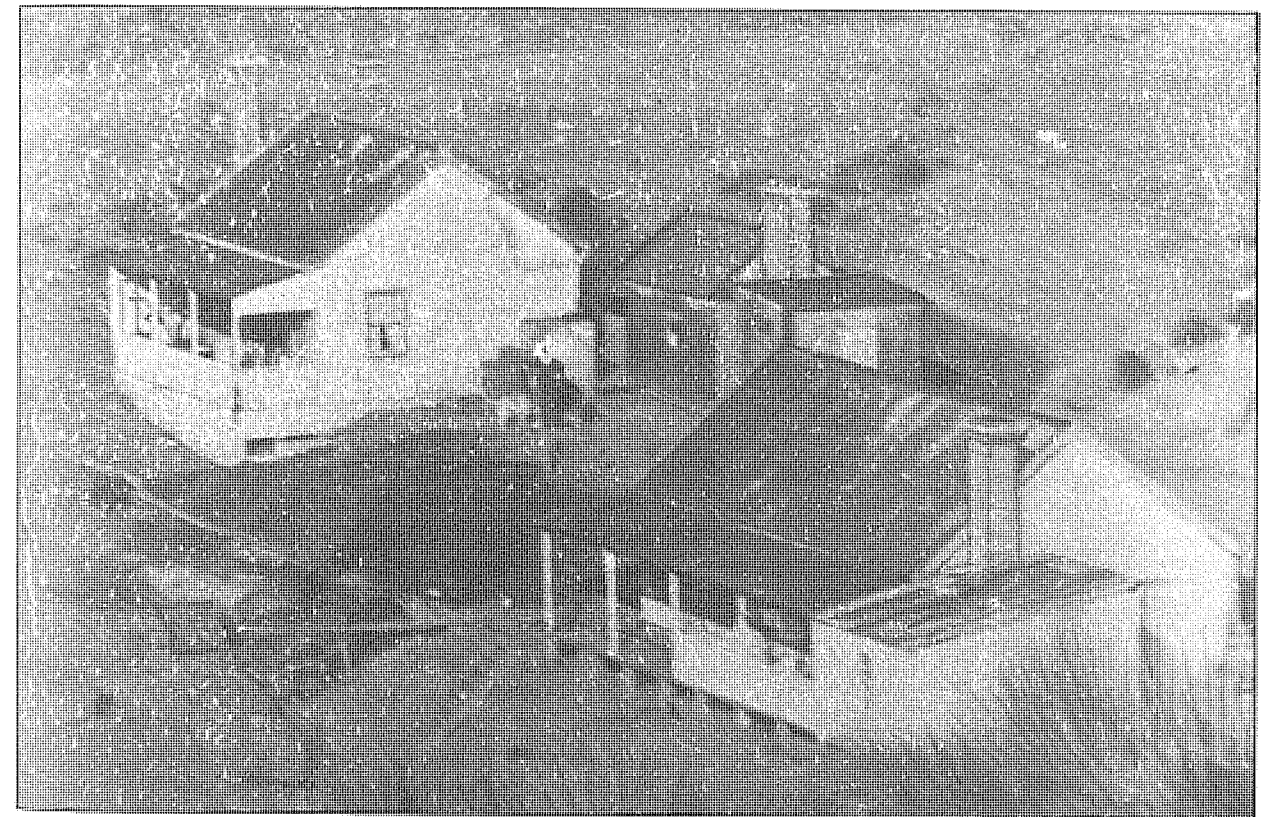
Problems with the underground workings had been overcome by tunnelling under the old workings. It was said that the mine was so well timbered that it looked like a forest of trees. In fact, most of the forest on the surface of Sunny Corner disappeared into the depths of the Sunny Corner silver mine to prop up the vast underground workings. Since the early days of surface-scratching gold mining, the mine had now become like a gigantic rabbit warren.

Over 400 men were now employed again at the mine, and another 9 tonnes of silver were extracted from it during the year of 1888.

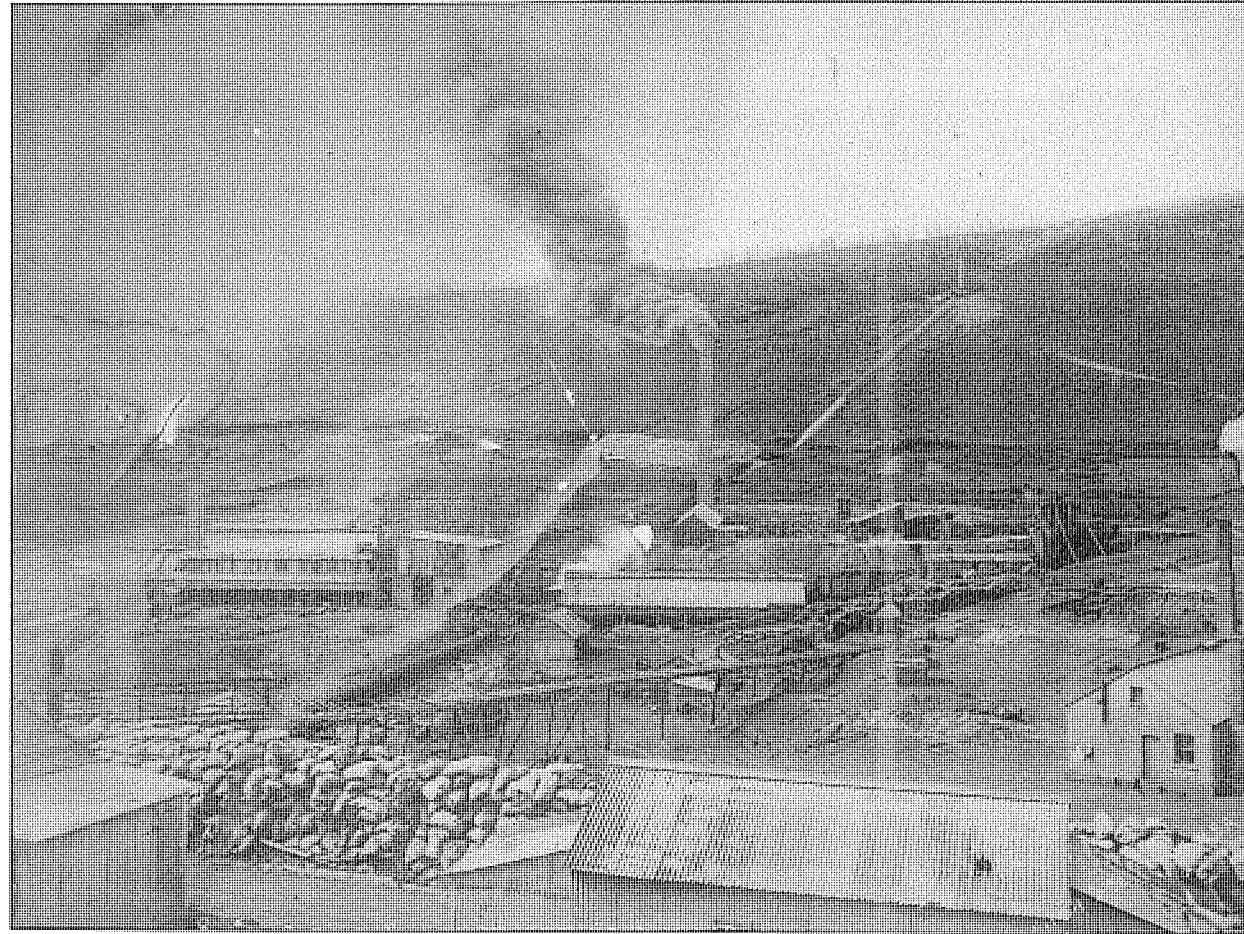
#### *Years of Renewed Optimism – 1889, 1890, 1891*

Great improvements were begun at the Sunny Corner mine in 1889 and continued for the next two years. A lot of money was invested by the company in improving the works. In 1890 it was decided that, as the old plant was completely worn out, it should be replaced. All the old furnaces were pulled down, and new constructions were begun on the opposite side of the gully to the original smelters.

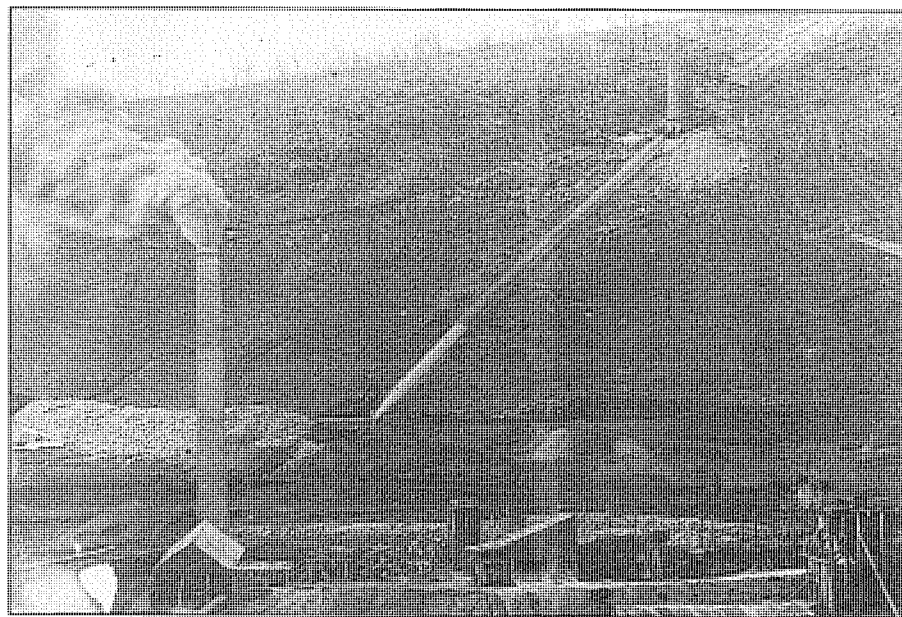
There were five new 50-ton capacity water-jacket smelters installed, a building made of cast slag blocks to house the boilers and blowers, and a new brick flue was built which connected up to a tall brick chimney stack.



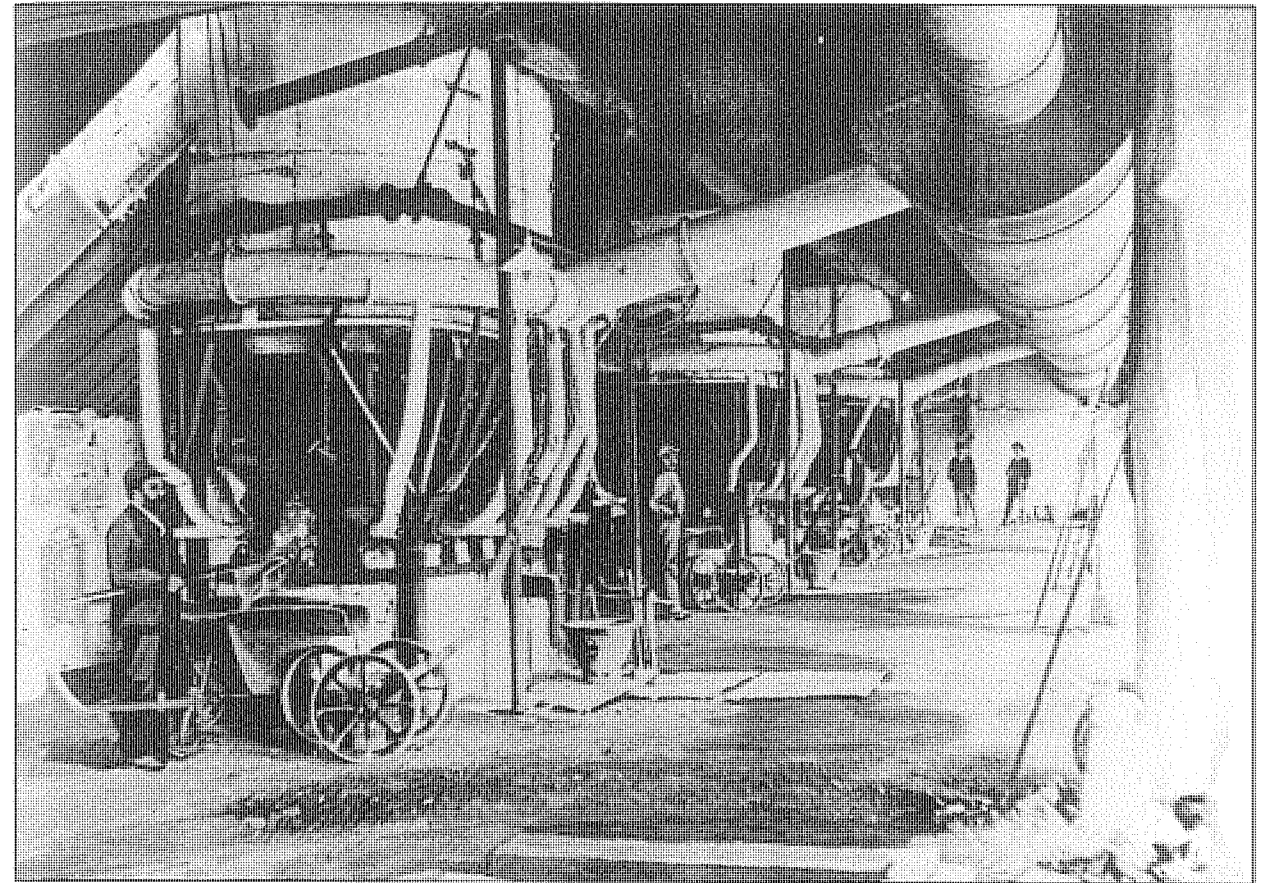




Above: Sunny Corner mine, showing the second row of smelters and the slag-block boiler house. These were connected to the square chimney during 1891. The quarter-mile brick flue and round chimney were still incomplete. The assay office can be seen on the right. Photo by Kitch and Co., Katoomba, courtesy Dale Bland, Yetholme



At right: Detail of the above view, showing round chimney half built, early 1891.



Sunny Corner smelting works, showing the blast furnaces, probably late 1891. Photo: "The Copper Mining Industry of N.S.W.", Carne, 1899

This chimney still stands today, as does the slag-block building. The brick flue is now partially collapsed; it was originally arched over the top to form a completely enclosed brick tunnel. When connected to the chimney the up-draught must have been tremendous, as the flue alone was a quarter of a mile (400 metres) long. The open roasting kilns were replaced by fifty-six enclosed calcining stalls, which were used to pre-treat the ore before smelting.

The old plant was closed down in October, 1890, and the new works were almost completed by that time, except for the chimney, so temporary use was made of another square chimney, part of an old reverberatory furnace. The fumes were bad during this time – the new chimney and flue were not connected to the works until later in 1891. Mr. Trewenack, the general manager of the mine, was proud to state in his report to the company in October, 1890, that the new plant would be "by far the best-arranged and most complete Plant for the economical working of complex Sulphide Ores in Australia."

A new main shaft was completed, with a new and complete winding plant. Extensive underground work continued, with the miners now employed under the contract system. The miners were to be paid according to the value of the ore they mined, rather than at a fixed daily wage. Generally the men worked harder with this system, with less supervision and with more production.

The problems with treating the sulphide ore were now under control, and silver production was beginning to increase again, with 11 tonnes being produced in 1891. There is a photograph (see pages 26 and 27) of the mine which was probably taken to celebrate the completion of the new plant, late in 1891. The new chimney had just been completed and was obviously connected up as smoke is pouring out from the top of it. John Charleston had been in charge of building the slag block boiler house and new chimney. He was for eighteen months the surface manager and engineer at the mine during 1890-91. A Cornishman, he was known as "The Bass" by the other Cornish miners, meaning "the boss".

When the last bricks had been cemented in place at the top of the chimney, Charleston is said to have walked around the top of it – no mean feat as the chimney stands at the rather giddy-making height of 23 metres, and has an internal diameter of 2.5 metres.

A great deal of money had been invested in the new works, which showed the great confidence of the Sunny Corner mine directors in the potential of their mine. All the past difficulties had been overcome, and many rich and productive years lay ahead ... or so they thought! The directors were therefore totally unprepared for the disastrous events which the following year of 1892 was to bring.

#### *The Collapse in the Price of Silver – 1892*

Banks worldwide were once obliged to keep large stocks of gold and silver, so that people using banknotes felt secure in the knowledge that at any time they could simply present the bank notes to the bank and receive coins of gold and silver, which had real worth as valuable metals. Banknotes could only be used successfully if a country had enough gold and silver in their bank reserve to cover the total amount of the banknotes printed. These days, governments generally use a money system based on responsible management, and do not rely on the gold-in-the-bank system, although gold is still used in international trade.

Up until the 1850s, most countries had used silver and gold both, as the standards in their monetary systems. Silver and gold had a set value that was agreed upon by all who used it. But after the 1850s, much of Europe decided to use only gold as a monetary standard. America would have changed over to the gold-only system as well, but for the fact that the western states of America were the centre for the largest silver mining industry in the world. There was much political wrangling within America over this issue, and as a consequence the introduction of the gold-only standard was delayed in America until 1900.

So after the 1850s, the price of silver was, in effect, fixed by the government of America, which continued to purchase silver from its own mines and also from overseas, so that it could be stashed away in the bank vaults. America was the main buyer of Australia's silver, but some other countries also used silver as a monetary standard; India, China and Japan. These countries also bought silver from Australia. The silver that England bought was used mostly by silversmiths, and was not used for coinage.

By 1892, America had decided to discontinue to prop up the price of silver, as a preliminary step in the changeover to a gold-only standard.

India also agreed to this, so in about 1892-3, silver prices world wide plummeted. There was also a world wide recession in the 1890s which caused a run on the banks as investors queued to draw out their money – many banks collapsed because of this.

China continued to use a silver monetary standard for another forty years, but generally it became apparent that the price of the real worth of silver had been kept artificially high. Even today, when silver is much valued for its practical worth, its value is still lower than it was in the days of silver money. The price of silver is based on its availability, and the demand for its use.

It is much sought after today for industrial purposes; the value of silver is based solely on its intrinsic worth as a useful metal and does not relate to money at all.

Uses of silver today include 35 per cent of all production being used in photography, 24 per cent in electrical products, 20 per cent in sterling silverware products, and the remaining 20 per cent in other miscellaneous products.

Prices of silver over the years are as follows:

before 1870	5/6 ounce
1870-1880	4/6 ounce
1883	a slow fall begins
October 1890	rose to 4/6 again
1892-3	collapse of silver price
1894	2/6 ounce
price remained stable at 2/6 ounce until 1917	
1917-22	3/- ounce
after 1923	2/6 ounce
1988	\$7 ounce (\$260 per kilogram)

John Kemp Charleston, mine manager at Sunny Corner in 1893. Photo by Charleston of Newcastle, courtesy Dale Bland, Yetholme



To show the comparative drop in the price of silver, four shillings and sixpence would today be worth roughly \$45. So one needed \$45 to buy an ounce of silver in the 1880s, \$25 in the 1890s, but only \$7 in 1988/9. The relative prices of gold have remained more stable, with £3 (\$600) buying one ounce of gold over a long period from the 1850s onwards, with gold prices today fluctuating, but recently up to \$500 and \$600 an ounce.

After the 1892 crash in silver prices, the Sunny Corner mine could not be worked at a profit as in previous years. It cost as much to treat the ore as the silver was worth. After only two months' work in 1892, the Sunny Corner silver mine closed down, with all the expensive new machinery lying idle – it had hardly been used. There were hopes that the price of silver would rise again, and the mine closure was seen as temporary. Most of the men had been sacked, although there were sixty men still being employed prospecting the mine during 1892, but by November, they too were out of work.

#### *Mine let on Tribute – 1893-1896*

John Kemp Charleston, who had been the surface manager and engineer for eighteen months during 1890-91, took over as manager of the Sunny





Sunny Corner miners, date unknown. Photo courtesy Bruce McPhail, Lithgow

Corner company's mine in 1893. The mine had been let to him on tribute. This meant that Charleston would receive no wages from the company, but he would be able to retain a certain proportion of the profit made by the mine. So the more economically he could work the mine, the more money he could make. It was quite a challenge with the low silver prices. The mine was let for three years, with the option of purchase. Charleston held the mine on tribute for the next four years, he must have extended the three-year period.

During this four year period, the mine continued with smelting operations. There were about 100 men employed, so probably the mine was running at a much reduced capacity as 400 to 500 men had once been employed. There were two or three smelters in continuous operation. In 1895, new workshops had been built, and a foundry was under construction. The returns were said to be very satisfactory, and by 1896 the mine was being systematically developed. With the new foundry, Charleston organised the casting of new water-jackets for the furnaces – these could now be made on the mine site. Charleston excelled as an engineer, but his understanding of the true worth of a mine seems to have been grossly over-optimistic.

#### *The Mine Struggles On – 1897-1914*

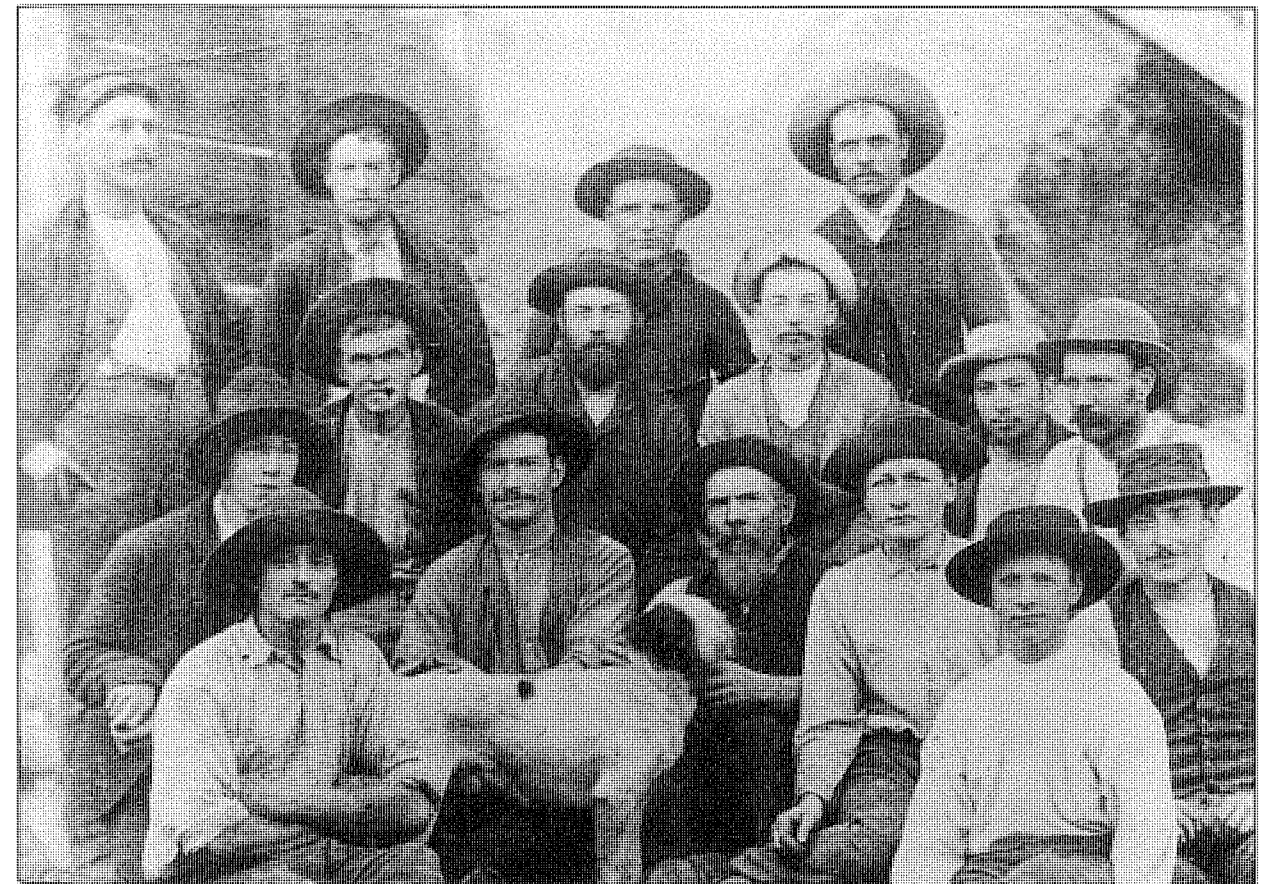
John Charleston now held the lease of the mine, along with his financial partner, Frank Lacroix Gardner. Gardner was an American millionaire

who had made his fortune on the West Australian goldfields with Zeb Lane in the 1880s. The date of the first association between Charleston and Gardner is not quite clear, but it was probably when Charleston had first taken over the Sunny Corner mine on tribute with option to purchase, and was looking for a financial backer.

Charleston and Gardner must have taken over the mine totally by 1897, the year when the mine ceased to be let on tribute by the Sunny Corner Silver Mining Company, which had probably folded by that time. The Department of Mines records on this matter do not mention the change of ownership. With the low silver prices, Charleston and Gardner left the Sunny Corner silver mine almost completely idle until 1900, there were just enough men employed there to retain the mining lease. Meanwhile Charleston and Gardner took to gold mining on nearby Lagoon Creek. A great deal of Gardner's money was lost on that venture when expensive equipment was installed to treat the almost non-existent gold. Both Charleston and Gardner believed in high technology for processing minerals, but neither of them seemed to know much about the real prospects of a mine.

The Sunny Corner mine was tested in 1898 to see if it could become a payable gold mine, but the Department of Mines geologist, Mr. Pitman, reported that mining for gold would not be payable, that even the silver and copper content in the ore was low, and "only the most extraordinary

Sunny Corner miners, date unknown. Photo courtesy Bruce McPhail, Lithgow



economy in mining and smelting operations will enable the lessees to work the mine at a profit".

But the lessees planned to do just that. They were not deterred by the failure of the Lagoon Creek mine, and in 1898 John Charleston said he was anxious to re-open the Sunny Corner mine, but did not want to do so by halves. Charleston never did anything by halves, he had grand ideas and great technical ability, but he was always unlucky with his choice of mines. The Lagoon mine had run out of gold, and now the Sunny Corner mine, just as he had taken it over, only offered poor grade sulphide ore mixed with silica, which made the ore even more difficult to treat.

Nevertheless, in 1900 the mine reopened. About 100 men were employed in mining, cleaning out the tunnels, re-laying the tram lines, and refitting the furnaces in preparation for smelting.

By 1901, 300 tons of sulphide ore had been mined, but most of the smelting that was done used up all the ore that was lying around the roasting kilns. In 1901, the Nevada mine was taken over by Charleston and was connected to the Sunny Corner mine by a tram line. The Nevada was unwatered and re-timbered, and it was planned to combine the ore from the Nevada mine with that from the Sunny Corner mine in the smelting process. It was thought that this combination of ores would make the smelting easier.

But by 1902, the mine was once again closed down – the Nevada experiment had been a failure. The lease held by Charleston and Gardner was cancelled through non-compliance with labour conditions, and the mine was taken over by the Sunny Corner Progress Committee.

For the next seven years, until 1909, Charleston again held the lease on the mine, and in this time the mine employed few men. Charleston spent his time experimenting with methods of treating the ore. He spent £1500 on building a small experimental brick furnace, capable of holding a 5-ton charge, for the purpose of extracting the zinc, which was a particularly troublesome mineral. He also experimented with re-treating the slag heaps. In 1906 he shipped off a parcel of ore to Antwerp in Belgium for an experimental treatment. The Department of Mines wrote in 1906, "so far all attempts to treat the complex ore from the Sunny Corner mine have proved unsuccessful". In 1908 Charleston thought he had found the solution in the treatment of the difficult sulphide lode. He was using a volatilizing and condensing process for the extraction of the 75 per cent zinc content of the ore. Of course at this time such experiments were going on at silver mines everywhere in the world, and it was to be the men from Broken Hill who finally solved the sulphide problem with a flotation process, which was being developed in these years, and finally perfected about 1920.

A company was formed in 1909, with capital of £25,000 to be invested in the Sunny Corner mine, but this money had to be refunded to the subscribers because of a delay in perfecting the titles to the leases. The leases were again cancelled in 1910. A new company took over again in 1911, and by 1912 the old workings had been repaired, and prospecting work was being done and a new tramway was built. Charleston was probably not involved in these workings, although he did take over the mine again in 1914. Gardner was involved in a fraud case to do with a gold

mine in Western Australia. Gardner was charged with having made deceiving reports about the Boulder Deeps mine near Kalgoorlie, in 1904. It is not clear whether he was still financing Charleston at that time. (Gardner was later to commit suicide.)

The Sunnyside Syndicate held the lease in 1913, and they were sending some ore off to the Cockle Creek Smelting Company near Newcastle, where new methods of ore treatment were being tried with some success. In April of the same year, the Zinc Corporation took an option purchase over the property and engaged in active work. Considerable exploration work was done, and this company spent some £5,000, but they did not find any new extensive ore-body. The ore that they did raise was of very poor quality. They then abandoned their option, and the leases were again cancelled for the non-observance of labour conditions.

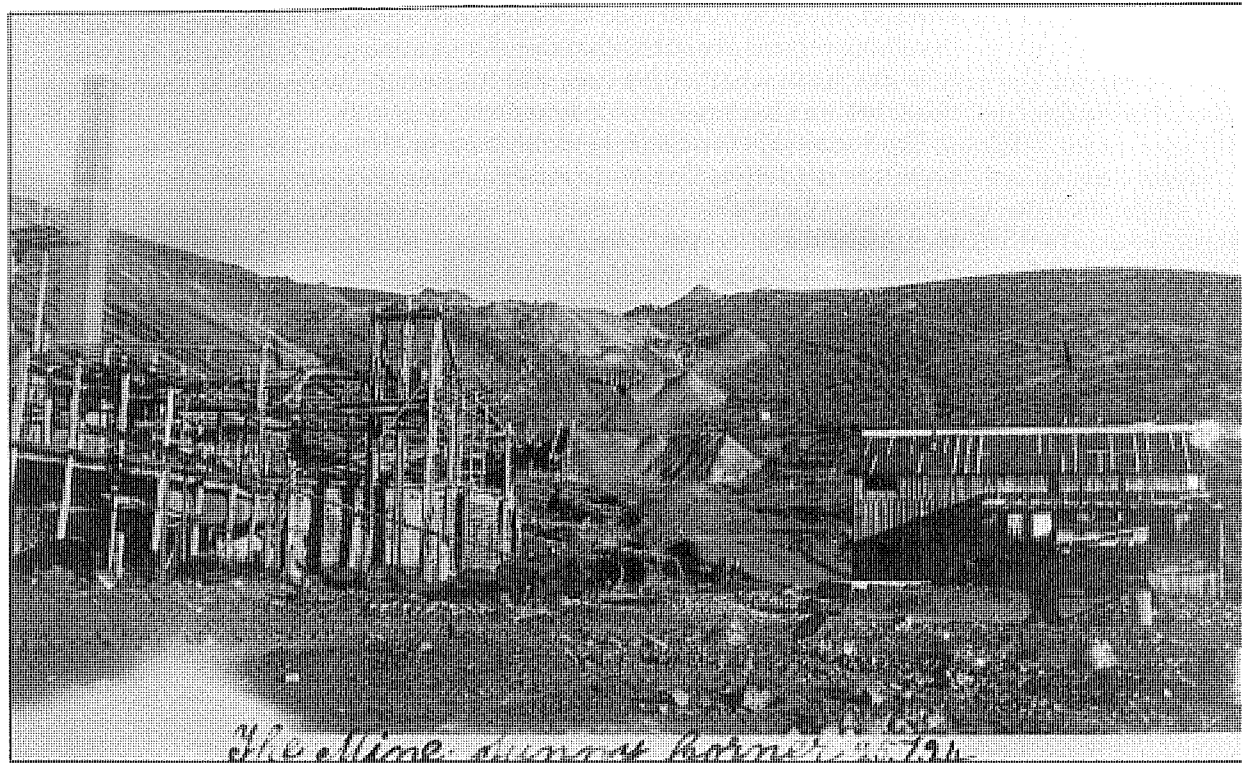
John Charleston now made his last move in regards to this mine. He once again took over the lease in 1914, and he raised 7 tons of ore which he planned to ship to Berlin in Germany for treatment, in the hope of securing a contract to supply a Berlin smelting company with ore from Sunny Corner. The 7 tons of Sunny Corner ore got as far as the wharf at Sydney, during July of that year, but the outbreak of the First World War prevented the ore from leaving the wharf. It was stored in a Sydney warehouse, and once again Charleston's plans had foundered.

There is a sad and touching story which runs parallel to the ever

Sunny Corner miners, date unknown. Photo courtesy Fitzgerald family, Portland and Bathurst







Sunny Corner mine, July 1924. Photo courtesy Marsden family, Portland

changing fortunes of the Sunny Corner mine, during the years of Charleston's involvement with it from 1893 until 1914. Charleston had come to Australia from Cornwall with at least one brother (who later became a photographer). The brothers had come from very poor beginnings and they hoped to do well for themselves in Australia. Their parents loved them dearly but were poorly educated themselves; they too hoped that their sons would be successful in a new land of opportunity. John Charleston wrote regularly to his aged parents, letters sent to his mother told her of his great plans in mining, and how soon he would have enough money to go home to see them both. But then one mining venture after another failed. His mother wrote to him in laboured handwriting, "Father he be poorly now, he do cry a lot and longs to see his boys". Charleston was unable to get home to see them, his mother's handwriting grew shakier with the years and his parents both died, without having seen their son again.

#### *Last Years of the Mine – 1915-1922*

C.W. Chiplin and party took over the cancelled leases in 1915. Chiplin was also the local schoolteacher. A concentration and flotation plant had been purchased with which to treat the ore – this was the latest technology available at that time. It could not have been much of a success, or perhaps it was never even installed, as little or no work was done during 1916. By 1917 the mine again had new owners. Walter B. Wilkinson had taken up the lease – the war had caused the price of silver to rise from two shillings and sixpence to three shillings an ounce – and he obviously hoped that

with this price rise, the mine could be made to pay. Some of the ore was sent to Cockle Creek smelters, but a penalty was made according to how much zinc was contained in the ore, the zinc was still difficult to treat as it tended to foul up the smelters. Wilkinson also built two furnaces for his own use. One was a water-jacket furnace and this was constructed from left-over water-jackets which he had found lying around the mine site. (Most of the earlier equipment had been removed years before).

The other was a reverberatory furnace built of brick. Wilkinson also carted up a stamper battery from Bob's Creek, but this was never assembled and was later sold for scrap. The Nevada lease was also held by Wilkinson and party. The mine was thus worked on a small scale; about half of the silver production was smelted on site, and the rest was from ore which had been sent to Cockle Creek. About 2000 to 3000 tons of ore was treated per year between 1917 and 1922, compared with around 25,000 tons per year which was being treated in the hey-day of the mine in the 1880s. Wilkinson's mining venture was quite successful while it lasted, but by 1922 the price of silver had dropped again and the mine could no longer be worked at a profit. The mine then closed down, and was never re-opened.

Walter Wilkinson was assisted in his venture by his brother, Lionel Wilkinson (who later cyanided for gold at the Paddy Lackey mine at Dark Corner in the 1930s). Lionel had three sons. One son, Col Wilkinson, still lives at Sunny Corner – he was four or five when his uncle started to work the Sunny Corner mine. Jack Wilkinson, who died several years ago, was some years older than his brother Col. Jack related some of his memories regarding the mine – he was about eleven or twelve when his uncle Walter came to Sunny Corner.

*Memoirs – Jack Wilkinson* (from a letter dated March, 1985)

Uncle Walter and Dad opened up the mine during the 1st World War. At first all that Uncle Walter did was to scrounge around and pick up all the metal lying around. Ore I mean. He also found that the big flue to the stack up the hill held flue dust about two feet deep, which was very rich in silver. He bagged and sold all of that. He also had a reverberatory furnace built by an old chap named Vipon, to treat the flue dust later on. [Mr. Vipon was a veteran of the early days of Sunny Corner mine.] This furnace used the big chimney stack at the bottom of the hill. [This was the square chimney, no longer standing.]

He also rebuilt and used one blast furnace. This was a big job, as the machinery other than the Rootes blowers had all been moved earlier. The boiler, I am fairly sure, came from the Bob's Creek battery, I am not sure about the engine. The boiler was brought over by bullocks and took some time. I can remember talk about winches to let the boiler down to the mine. It was installed in the old boiler room. Only one blast furnace was built. There were lots of spare water-jackets around. The furnace had four water-jacketed sides, above the firebrick bottom. If a water-jacket leaked into the furnace it could go up like Krakatoa!

A man was watching the water in the jacket all the time. If it stopped running out there was great excitement. Apparently, some time previously one had blown up and great care was being taken.

A mixture of ore, and various fluxes was used. I can remember the men

talking of so many wheelbarrow loads of ore, so many of limestone and so many of other stuff. It was a continuous treatment. The slag and metal were both drawn off at the bottom through plug holes, which were plugged with clay when unused. Great long bars punched a hole in the clay and out came a stream of white hot slag, into the pot. When the pot was full it was moved and tipped, a hell of a job.

The metal, when tapped, was below the slag hole a little. It ran into a pot and the overflow, if any, ran into a slag pot. The metal was a bit different in colour when coming from the furnace. It was an experts job as everything could be lost if metal was tipped over the dump instead of slag. It did happen sometimes too, if the men were stirred up and were annoyed. The great metal 'pigs' were cooled, chipped and loaded, and sent to be refined somewhere else.

When a furnace went out for some reason, or burnt out the bricks or water-jacket, it was an awful job to clean the bottom. Usually it was blasted to be broken up. But great big 'sows' of metallic stone lay around the place from the old time furnaces. The stone, ore, fluxes, etc., were fused together in one great mass. Many were just buried. I can remember Dad digging one up at an old smelter site between the recreation ground and the reservoir [i.e., the Public Smelter, operational 1885–1887]. It weighed over five tons and had to be drilled and blasted. Uncle Walter sold it later. There was no sign of a furnace there when it was dug up, other than some old fire bricks.

Ore was also burnt in kilns. Lance and I nearly fell into one once. It was nice and warm for our feet, until the crust broke. The wood was heaped and then covered with ore and burnt. It was supposed to remove a lot of the sulphur and arsenic. The ore was later shipped away.

All the mine buildings, tanks and sheds etc., were built of American oregon timber. The timber used underground at Broken Hill was also oregon pine. There must have been a big fleet of boats bringing it out to Australia.

[The timber used underground at Sunny Corner was mostly local hardwood – Broken Hill had no suitable timber growing in that area and so had to rely on the timber sent from America.]

Col Wilkinson has recounted how the flue dust was collected. This lead-laden dust lay two feet deep inside the brick flue which led up to the main chimney stack, half way up the mine hill. This dust had accumulated over the years from the smelter fumes – it was rich in lead, silver and other minerals and was to be profitably treated. The men entered the flue tunnel at the top end, near the chimney, and began shovelling this dust, which was extremely fine and dry. Once this movement had been started, the dust began to flow like water, downhill through the flue. It was later collected from the bottom end of the flue and put into bags. This was not the healthiest of occupations due to the high lead content in the dust.

The mine had shut down during 1922, and the leases were cancelled. In 1937, George Wright took up the lease on Sunny Corner mine. A small amount of mining was done in 1937 and in 1949, this being open cutting of surface gossan, and opening out of the so-called New Find tunnel, which had originally been worked in the early days of the mine. Mary



Sunny Corner miners, August 1891. Photo by Kitch and Co., Katoomba, courtesy T. Parmenter, Sydney

Wright, daughter of George Wright, still holds the mine leases, although no work has been done at the mine since 1949 apart from exploration by different companies.

#### *Recent Exploration of the Mine – 1963-1988*

The economic potential of the Sunny Corner region, including the mine site, has been investigated by General Resources Ltd. in 1963-1964, Occidental Minerals in 1974, and B.H.P. in 1979 and 1988. Conclusions so far are that minerals remain in the ground, but that it is not economic to mine them.

Meanwhile, the ruins of the Sunny Corner mine workings, and also the Silver King mine workings, have been declared an historic site by the Department of Lands in March, 1978, with trustees being appointed in October, 1984. The site was classified by the National Trust of Australia on 25th March, 1985. Thus the surface of the mine site is now protected, but this does not mean that mining could not be recommenced at some future date.

#### *How Much Silver has the Sunny Corner Mine Produced?*

The Sunny Corner silver mine produced over 3.5 million ounces of silver from 1884 to 1922, most of this was produced in the 1880s. This is the equivalent of roughly 100 tonnes of pure silver. Based on the value of four





Sunny Corner miners, date unknown. Photo courtesy T. Parmenter, Sydney

shillings and sixpence an ounce (which was the 1880s value), the silver was worth £800,000 which in today's dollars would be worth roughly \$160 million. The value of silver has dropped considerably since those days, and 100 tonnes of silver (at today's price of \$7 an ounce) would only be worth \$25 million.

An estimated 30,000 ounces of gold was produced from the mine from 1884 to 1922. Gold values are roughly the same now as they were then, and, at \$500 an ounce (approximate 1988/9 value), 30,000 ounces of gold would today be worth \$15 million.

This amount excludes the gold obtained from the mine site prior to 1884, and that amount was considerable.

Copper was also produced - 1,500 tonnes - worth today about \$6 million, plus a quantity of lead estimated to be worth perhaps \$500,000.

SILVER	100 tonnes	(£800,000)	\$160 million
GOLD	.8 tonne		\$15 million
COPPER	1500 tonnes		\$6 million
LEAD			\$0.5 million

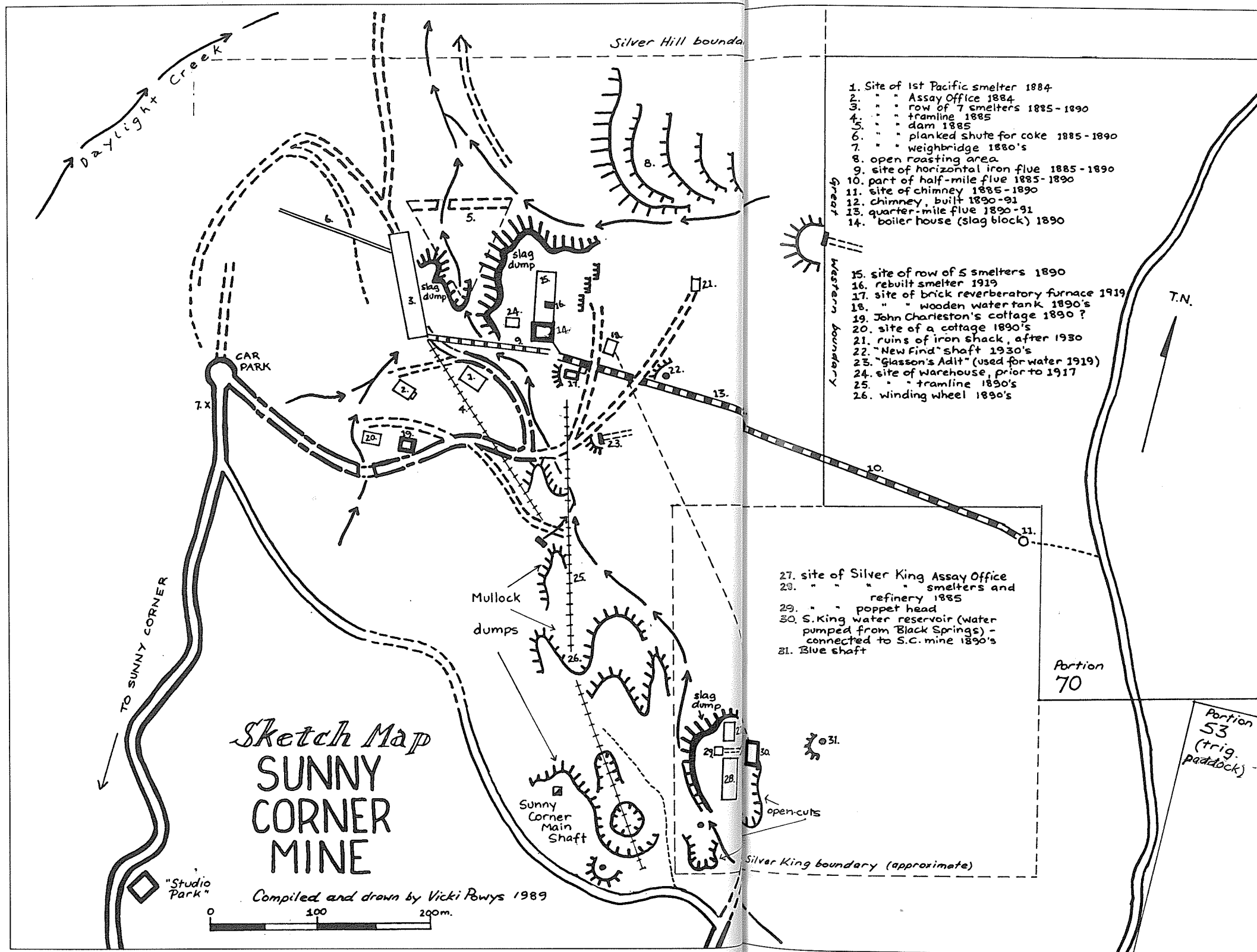
Total monetary worth of output from Sunny Corner Mine, 1884-1922, in today's dollars, over \$181 million.

Conversion estimates are based on £1 = \$200. A working man's wage was about £2 per week in the 1880s and 1890s (and inflation much lower), while today a man's wage is very approximately \$400 per week. Four pairs of working boots could be bought for £1 in 1900, and today four pairs of boots would cost \$200. The price of gold was £3 an ounce in the 1880s and later, and recently gold has been worth \$600 an ounce, although now about \$500 an ounce. All these sums point to a round figure of £1 = \$200.

#### SUNNY CORNER SILVER MINING COMPANY PRODUCTION FIGURES

YEAR	SILVER	GOLD	COPPER
1884	37370 oz		
1885	731520 oz		
1886	547589 oz		
1887	318016 oz		
1888	319324 oz	2300 oz	309 tons
1889	182390 oz (est.)		
1890	272405 oz (est.)		
1891	404006 oz	4048 oz	344 tons
1892	108462 oz		77 tons
1893	9428 oz		15 tons (est.)
1894	145988 oz		200 tons (est.)
1895	91285 oz		100 tons (est.)
1896	95982 oz		200 tons (est.)
1901	15256 oz	190 oz	38 tons
1913	4594 oz (est.)		
1914	266 oz (est.)		
1918	120000 oz (est.)		75 tons
1919	60000 oz	300 oz	35 tons
1920	30000 oz	300 oz	30 tons
1921	12800 oz	20 oz	24 tons
1922	4000 oz	30 oz	5 tons
	3,510,681 oz	8,876 oz	1,452 tons

All these figures have been taken directly from Department of Mines annual reports, year by year. Estimates are given where the production was for matte (mixed metal ingots) - the amount of silver being reckoned by taking three quarters of the total monetary value of the matte, divided by an average silver price of that time (four shillings per ounce before 1893, three shillings per ounce after 1893). The total estimate for gold production is obtained by roughly tripling the known quantity to compensate for the missing years. Copper, where estimated, is taken as roughly half the total weight of matte production for the given year.



## MINE MANAGERS AND LEASEHOLDERS

William F. Hurley	March 1879- October 1885
Gresley Lukin	legal manager, 1885
W. Nicholas	temporary manager, 1885
J. Macavie Smith	assayer and superintendent of works 1884
Mr. Janitzky	assayer, 1885
Thomas Eyre	manager, 1886, 1887
E.W. Woodgate	assayer and smelting manager 1886, 1887
Edgar Hall	manager
Henry Hampton	underground manager 1890 or 1889 to late 1891
William H. Trewenack	general manager, 1890 or 1889 to late 1891
Mr W. Joseph Longton	underground manager, 1888
J.K. Charleston	surface manager and engineer 1890-91; manager on tribute, 1893-96; leaseholder, 1897-1901, 1903-9, 1914
Sunny Corner Progress Committee	leaseholder, 1903
unknown company	leaseholder, 1910-12
Sunnyside Syndicate	leaseholder, 1913
C.W. Chiplin	leaseholder, 1915
Walter Wilkinson	leaseholder 1917-22
George Wright	leaseholder 1937 onwards
Mary Wright	leaseholder after George Wright, and also holder of current lease

*Sunny Corner Mine – Surface Installations*

The buildings and above ground machinery, smelters etc., underwent many changes during the years that the Sunny Corner mine was operating. Much machinery was broken up and sold as scrap metal many years ago, the assay office, the square chimney, brick furnaces and possibly other buildings were demolished for bricks. Some of the slag was reprocessed after being removed from its original site. However there are still many clues left for the student who is attempting to reconstruct the appearance of the mine in its hey-day. With the help of old photographs, mine reports and newspaper cuttings, a map has been compiled which shows what was where in the 1880s and 1890s.

So far no original map has been found which shows the above ground works of the Sunny Corner mine. But there is a map which shows the extent of the old underground workings, and this map has been included in this book. These underground tunnels and shafts are now in a most dangerous state, either totally collapsed or not far from it, and their exploration is not recommended.

The first smelters of the Sunny Corner mine were on the western side of the Mine Creek. Later, additional smelters and machinery were placed on the north-east side, where the largest slag pile is today.

*Smelters* – The first smelter in use was a Pacific 20-ton capacity water-jacket furnace, imported from San Francisco. This was put into blast on 27th August, 1884. This smelter was housed within a large four-storey shed which had an iron roof. The bottom floor measured 30 feet by 40 feet and contained a boiler, two engines, a pump attached to a well and delivering 30,000 gallons of water a day, plus moulds and appliances. The next floor stored coke, and the furnace was fed from this level. Above that was a floor 50 feet by 40 feet which contained a Blake's Stone Breaker, powered by an eight-horsepower engine. This was used for cracking large lumps of ore into smaller pieces which could be fed into the furnace. The ore itself was stored on the top floor, and was connected directly to the mine tunnel exit with a three-railed tramway.

The next smelter to be completed was the larger Probert smelter of 60-ton capacity. It stood 150 yards distant from the Pacific, and was put into blast in early December, 1884. By the end of 1885, the first Pacific smelter was moved next to the Probert, and a milling plant was built on its former site in mid-1886. By December, 1885, there was a row of smelters in place, including six Pacifics (all imported from San Francisco, and brought out by steamship by Mr. La Monte), and the large Probert, seven smelters in all. A large planked shoot for receiving coke ran down the hill to these smelters, and tramways brought ore from the mine tunnels.

This first row of smelters was closed down on 31st October, 1890. A new row was almost complete on the opposite side of the gully and were in blast by December, 1890. They comprised of four 50-ton capacity cast iron water-jacket smelters of the Bartlett brand, built by Mort and Co., Sydney, plus one 30-ton capacity smelter, (perhaps one of the Pacifics). The earlier smelters were worn out and discarded. The new smelters stood in a line to the north of the slag-block boiler house which still stands today. This boiler house contained two 15-ton boilers which drove two 25-horsepower engines. These in turn drove five blowing machines (two Rootes blowers and three Bakers blowers). The blast from these was carried through a main wind pipe four feet-nine inches in diameter. A section of this wind-pipe remains at the mine site, as does part of one of the blowers.

A water-jacket smelter on that site today (now in ruins) was built in about 1918, using old discarded water-jackets which were found lying around the mine site by Walter Wilkinson. This re-cycled smelter was worked successfully. Bases of the 1890 smelters can still be seen.

*Flues* – There were always problems with the fumes from the smelting process, and several different attempts were made to carry away the fumes. Early photographs show various chimney stacks directly over the smelter sites. But as well as these, during 1885 was built "Half a mile of immense fluming with a chimney at the terminus". (Note that this does not refer to the remains of the present flue). This half mile (804 metres) of flue ran from the first row of smelters to the top of the mine hill. There was firstly a horizontal portion, constructed from riveted iron plates to measure four feet in diameter. This section was 400 feet long, and was carried on top of tressles which were five feet-six inches high. This flue can be recognised in some early photographs of the mine. In every two feet of this flue was an opening on the underside, where large funnels were connected to sacks which collected the flue dust. This length of iron flue then connected with a trench flue which continued to the

summit of the hill; one account says it was capped with two smokestacks. There is no exact description of this section of the flue, but it must have been covered in some way. Despite the enormous length of this flue, it was not wholly successful.

When the second row of smelters was installed, another flue was built. This flue ran through the furnace building and up the hill side, in approximately the same position as the original flue. But this time the trench was huge – it was six feet deep, the sides were lined with clay bricks, slag bricks and stone, and then arched over with more bricks which had been made at the mine. It was six feet-six inches wide and seven feet-six inches deep from the top of the arch. This brick flue was very well constructed, and its ruins can still be seen today. It ran only half way up the hill, and was there connected to the large chimney stack which still stands today. The original flue line continues on above this chimney, and evidence of another chimney can be seen near the top of the hill, but this top chimney would not have been connected up when the present chimney was in operation. The present chimney was completed by the end of 1891. The second row of smelters had been finished a year before that, and they were temporarily connected to a square chimney near the base of the hill. This square chimney had been part of a reverberatory furnace, and stood 113 feet high (34 metres). It was demolished for bricks in the 1940s. The brick flue of 1890-91 ran for a quarter of a mile (400 metres).

*Tramlines* – these ran “here there and everywhere” at various stages during the history of the mine. Evidence of a tramline can be seen running up the hill to the south of the smelters, amidst huge heaps of waste rock which came from the innards of the mine (known as mullock dumps). Another tramline once ran directly from the first Pacific smelter to the entrance of one of the mine tunnels. Tramlines ran inside the tunnels as well as outside, and were continually being moved from one place to another. A tramline connected Nevada mine with Sunny Corner mine in 1901 – ore was brought up from Nevada some two kilometres to the Sunny Corner smelters.

*Other* – A huge poppet head stood over the main shaft, a horse and whip was being used for haulage in 1890 before being replaced by engines.

Open roasting was done on a site to the north of the mine. It was planned to build thirty-two calcining stalls from slag bricks, somewhere above the smelters when the new works were going ahead in 1890-91, but these were probably never completed. Some evidence of slag bricks can be seen above the 1890 smelter area. These stalls were to be close to the feeding floors of the furnaces. Various retaining walls seen behind the furnaces were probably to do with the different levels of the main smelter shed, where ores and fluxes were stored before being tipped into the top of the smelters. The calcining stalls were to replace the open roasting kilns, and would be covered from the weather.

The assay office was built in 1884 of Lithgow bricks. It contained several small furnaces used for testing samples of ore. The building had two or three chimneys, one of them was quite tall. This building was demolished for bricks – some evidence of its location remains, notably the ash heap from the testing furnace.

There were a number of cottages around the mine. One remains in ruins, on

the road leading down to the mine. This was where John Charleston lived, and he is also supposed to have built this cottage.

A foundry for casting iron was built at the mine in 1895, its site is not known. A two storey warehouse of timber construction was built probably in the later 1890s, it was still standing in the 1920s in a deteriorating condition. It contained many wooden patterns, possibly connected with patterns used in the iron foundry. This building stood in front of the slag-block boiler house. It does not appear in early 1890s photos.

A concentration and flotation plant was to be installed in 1915, site unknown.

A reverberatory furnace was built of brick about 1919. This probably stood next to the square chimney (which had been built earlier). Another reverberatory furnace had occupied this same site prior to 1890.

From 1886 onwards there was a large array of ever changing equipment, many of the sites are unknown. Included were an amalgamating plant, a ten-stamper battery, eight reverberatory furnaces, a sintering furnace, calcining furnaces, matting furnaces, roasting furnaces and open roasting kilns. The Probert furnace had its own chimney stack. The battery was somewhere further up the hill on the south side of the mine, but the exact site is unknown. A five stamper battery lies in ruins on the Silver King mine site – this battery was installed there in 1929-30 by Bill Coleman from Portland.

*Fluxes* – The Eskbank Iron Company of Lithgow supplied, in 1885, much of the ironwork used at the Sunny Corner mine, including all the tramlines. They also supplied bricks. Iron was also used as a flux in the smelters, and this was supplied from Lithgow also. Iron-rich slag from the Lithgow smelters was being sold to the Sunny Corner mine for use as flux in silver smelting. It was delivered to Rydal for thirty shillings per ton, where previously it had been discarded as useless.

Coke for the furnaces also came from Lithgow, but when the furnaces had first started, coke was brought all the way from Newcastle.

Limestone was carted from many locations; one of these was a quarry at Dark Corner, near Coolamigal Creek. Lead was also used in the smelting process, and if there was insufficient in the ore, it had to be brought from elsewhere.

A recipe from December 1885 shows the quantities of fluxes used:- The charge for one furnace would be, 230 lb. of gossan ore, 45 lb. of quartz, 15 lb. of limestone, (all broken into small pieces by a stone crushing machine), 60 lb. of litharge, 40 lb. of coke, three bricks made of flue dust and a shovelful of slag. These charges were weighed up on scales, wheeled in barrows from the scales to the tops of the furnaces, and shovelled in.

### *Supply of Water to Sunny Corner, Mines and Town*

Lack of water has always been something of a problem at Sunny Corner, especially in the early mining days. There is no river here to provide fresh water, and only a few small creeks. The townspeople were at first dependent upon rainwater catchment, and later, wells were sunk. In 1891 the town reservoir was completed, although today the pipeline to the town is leaky and rusted.

Up until 1884, water had been needed for the stamper batteries, most of



which were situated along Mitchell's Creek and Bob's Creek. After 1884, Sunny Corner mine began smelting silver ore using a type of furnace which used water-jackets. Water had to be pumped into the water-jackets to keep them cool. Also the steam boilers used water, as did various other processes. Where did this water come from? There are few mentions made in the reports of the mine, but there are just enough clues to piece together a general picture of the water supply.

In 1884, use was made of two underground reservoirs at the mine site, one was described as being 900 feet (274 metres) in diameter, the other was 200 feet (60 metres) in diameter. In August of 1884 they were described as "underground tanks", and the water was "conserved as it runs from the heart of the mountain and the supply never goes short even in the driest seasons." The 900 feet diameter tank would have been enormous, yet its site remains a mystery.

Water was also pumped up from a well which had a daily capacity of 30,000 gallons. Hot water from the water-jackets ran into a trough which surrounded the top of the furnace; from here it was pumped into a well, cooled then pumped up into a reservoir to re-supply the furnaces again. This was the 1884-85 system, by April 1886 the water was pumped up to an elevated wooden holding tank before being gravity fed into the six water-jacket furnaces.

In June, 1885 it was reported that "a large dam is to be constructed for water". The bank of this dam can still be seen below the site of the smelters, and the dam itself can be seen in an 1886 woodcut of the Sunny Corner mine. The water pumped from this dam must have caused some problems as it would have been heavily mineralized and acidic even before any contamination was caused by the fallout from the smelters. The acid water would have played havoc with the iron water-jacket smelters, iron boilers and other iron machinery. The creek which fed this dam is still badly polluted with heavy metals and acid after almost a hundred years. Mention is made in the director's report of October, 1891 regarding this problem: "We have experienced great trouble with the cast iron jackets, the highly mineralized water used is probably the cause of this."

By 1895, water was being pumped from Black Springs (below Sunny Corner reservoir) to the mine, via the Silver King mine which had closed some years before. There was a pump breakdown during 1895, and John Charleston who was the mine manager, connected up pipes to the town reservoir on a temporary basis.

When the mine was being worked by W.B. Wilkinson in 1917 – 1922, water was used from the water tunnel (marked Glassons adit on maps). This was an old mine tunnel which had the entrance boarded up completely; spring water ran into the tunnel and was stored there, and run down to the mine workings by a pipeline as needed. This water was not acidic – today it does not taste acidic but it still may be carrying heavy metals. But the quality of this water was far superior to that which flowed in the Mine Creek.

A photograph of the mine taken in the 1890s shows a line running down across the hillside from the site of the Silver King mine to the Sunny Corner mine and this could well have been a water pipeline. There was a wooden water storage tank which stood above the smelters, its foundations can still be seen today. It was built of huge planks of American oregon timber and was quite watertight. Probably the water that was pumped via the Silver King mine was stored in this tank which most likely dates from the 1890s.

The original water supply to the Silver King mine is quite well documented – it seems that they had much better quality water than did the Sunny Corner mine, but they also had a mile (1.6 kilometres) of pipeline to supply it. (This was the pipeline later taken over by the Sunny Corner mine). A description in February 1886 of the Silver King water supply states that:-

The water for keeping the smelters cool is pumped to a height of 160 feet from the Black Springs, a distance of 5000 feet [about a mile], and runs into a cemented reservoir with a holding capacity of 100,000 gallons. Thence it is fed into 3 large wooden tanks, and the hot water from the jackets is passed into 3 others to cool, and finally run back into the reservoir to be used again.

The pipeline was laid during 1885, the reservoir into which the water was pumped can still be seen today. It is situated above the site of the Silver King mine next to an area which has been open-cut mined. The reservoir has been dug into the ground and is rectangular in shape and originally lined with stone and brick and faced with cement. The wooden tanks were built of Californian redwood. Two large dams were constructed on the creek at Black Springs, where the Silver King mine leased 60 acres. These dams are marked on some older maps. The lowest dam bank still remains although it does not hold water. Both these dams had been let go by the town residents prior to 1917, after a child had drowned there.

## SILVER KING MINE

This silver mine was the next most important mine to the main Sunny Corner mine. At one time it had three smelters in operation, and employed up to 150 men. Its total production was around 8 tonnes of silver, compared with 100 tonnes of silver from the Sunny Corner mine.

The mine finally closed in 1890, having been mined to the boundary line where it adjoined the Sunny Corner mine. The Silver King mine was therefore largely unaffected by the fall in silver prices of 1892, they simply ran out of ore before that time. There were some difficulties regarding the treatment of the ore, but these had been overcome before the mine closed.

The Silver King mine held a lease of 20 acres, compared with the 205 acres of the Sunny Corner mine (although most of the mining on the Sunny Corner mine was done on a 25-acre block). This lease was quite close to the main shaft of the Sunny Corner mine, lying to the east of it.

The 20-acre block was worked for gold in about 1882 or 1883, having been first opened up by John Hurley and John Shepherd, (who also held the Sunny Corner mine lease). John Hurley's brother, George Hurley, was the manager of the mine in 1884, and in that year silver was first mined; the ore was put into sacks and a trial shipment of 30 tons was sent to England for treatment. As soon as the first successful smelting had been done at the Sunny Corner mine in August of 1884, it was decided to install a similar furnace on the site of the Silver King mine.

In about October of 1884, Shepherd and Hurley decided to sell this mine for some reason – it appeared then to have all the indications of a very rich silver mine. Perhaps they received an offer that they could not refuse. So the mine passed into the hands of a number of shareholders, one of whom named the mine the Silver King. This was Mr. W. Clark, who held a 50 per cent interest in the new Silver King company. Tenders were then called for the supply and

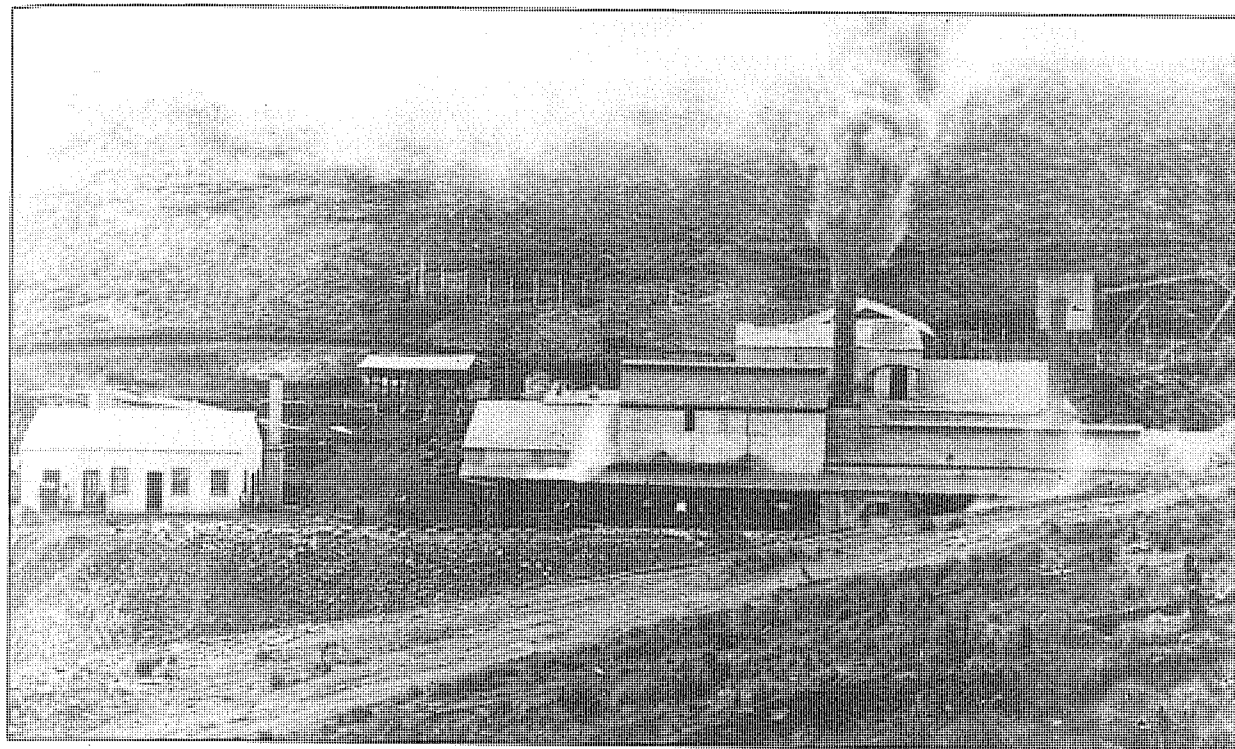
installation of silver smelting furnaces.

One of the Americans employed at the Sunny Corner mine, as part of Mr. La Monte's team (he helped construct the first smelters there), obviously had an interest in designing his own smelters and was no longer content to work for La Monte. This was Mr. J.B. Gafford – he designed a high water-jacket furnace which worked on the same principle as the Sunny Corner smelters but had higher sides to it. Gafford had one of these smelters built in Sydney by Hudson Brothers of Granville, and a successful trial run was made in Sydney during April of 1885. This smelting furnace was known as a Gafford and Hogue Patent. A.E. Hogue, a metallurgist, had helped with the design. Gafford was then given the contract to supply the Silver King mine with two Gafford and Hogue patent smelters, of 20 to 25 ton daily capacity, to build a refinery and to supply all other necessary equipment. He would also be in charge of running the furnaces for the first few months.

Construction works went ahead rapidly, under the watchful eye of Mr. George Lemon, the mine manager. Mr. Lemon was a practical miner of English and American experience. Another account claims that he was an American. After five months of work, the smelters were ready to be lit. There was some nervousness by now, as a couple of months before had occurred the "Nevada panic" when that mine had failed with its first smelting attempt. A newspaper account of 3rd December, 1885, vividly describes the local tension, and also the commencement of smelting operations.

In the early morning, crowds of miners were in the main street, in the manner characteristic of mining communities, discussing the situation. While all were confident, many expressed an opinion in effect that if anything 'went wrong' to-day, following rapidly on the Nevada affair, it meant 'goodbye' to the field outside the parent mine [i.e. Sunny Corner mine]... Operations were commenced. A small fire was ignited at the bottom of the furnace. Huge quantities of coke were pitched into it from the platform above. The terrific blower was set to work to keep up the fire, and the water was turned on to keep its average in the proper place. Then followed limestone, ironstone, bars of lead, and the first barrowload of ore. Those around were on the impulse of the moment inclined to cheer, but unconsciously suppressed the inclination for a more important moment soon to follow. Into the immense cauldron other quantities of coke, limestone, ironstone, leaden bars and ore were thrown. Soon afterwards the largest gathering of anxious spectators were standing at the mouth of the furnace amid all the excitement of the moment, and we might add the heat of the furnace. Messrs. Gafford and Hogue were apparently the coolest and most collected men of the crowd. Their explanation was that they had nothing to fear as long as the outside of the furnace remained cool, of which they frequently assured themselves by standing on the box and passing their hands over the outside.

Without warning, the furnaceman, about an hour after the start, smashed in the mud-closed aperture and out poured the slag. A few seconds observation of the manner of it running convinced Mr. W. Hurley, the late manager of the Sunny Corner mine, that all was right, and he led the ringing cheers that followed. Little bullion appeared in the receptacle at the side of the furnace for the first two hours. That which did not appear was being absorbed. The fact that it was being absorbed was revealed by the cleanness



The Silver King mine, late 1885. Photo courtesy Bruce McPhail, Lithgow

of the slag blocks, all appearances of lead being entirely absent. At 5 o'clock the first bullion was run off. As was anticipated, the first few lots were covered with a scum of inferior bullion, being largely mixed with slag, but after the dam was emptied several times, it diminished until it almost disappeared altogether. The bullion continued to run off at intervals of two or three minutes, and within the first hour, 12 moulds of one hundred weight were filled. No stoppage occurred, but the furnace continued working at the rate of upwards of 30 tons in 24 hours, and the bullion continued to run, to the delight and satisfaction of everybody.

Before the end of December, 1885, the second furnace was started up. These smelting furnaces had one distinct advantage over those of the Sunny Corner mine. Due to an improved design, the fumes from these smelters were treated much more efficiently than those noxious fumes which emanated from the Sunny Corner company's smelters. This was due to the application of live steam in the funnel, which drove a great deal of the lead and arsenic back into the furnace. On 15th January, 1886 it was reported: "the dense sluggish fumes are visible within the furnace, but they pass away into the flume leading to the stack close by, apparently without the slightest escape in transit." Of course, poisonous fumes still came out of the chimney, but the Silver King mine was situated quite high up on the mine hill, and the wind carried the fumes elsewhere.

Apart from Mr. Gafford, two other Americans who had worked for La Monte at the Sunny Corner mine came to work at the Silver King mine. These were Mr. Anderson (a furnaceman at the Sunny Corner mine), who would be in charge of running the furnaces, and Mr. A. Mynott (refiner at Sunny Corner mine), to be in charge of refining at the Silver King mine.

It was thought that the furnaces would be able to run for three years continuously without stopping, but a water shortage caused the shut down of the two furnaces after only two months, in February of 1886. After April rains, the furnaces could be restarted, but they were stopped again in June. There were problems with the ore – it had become more difficult to treat. The experiments began.

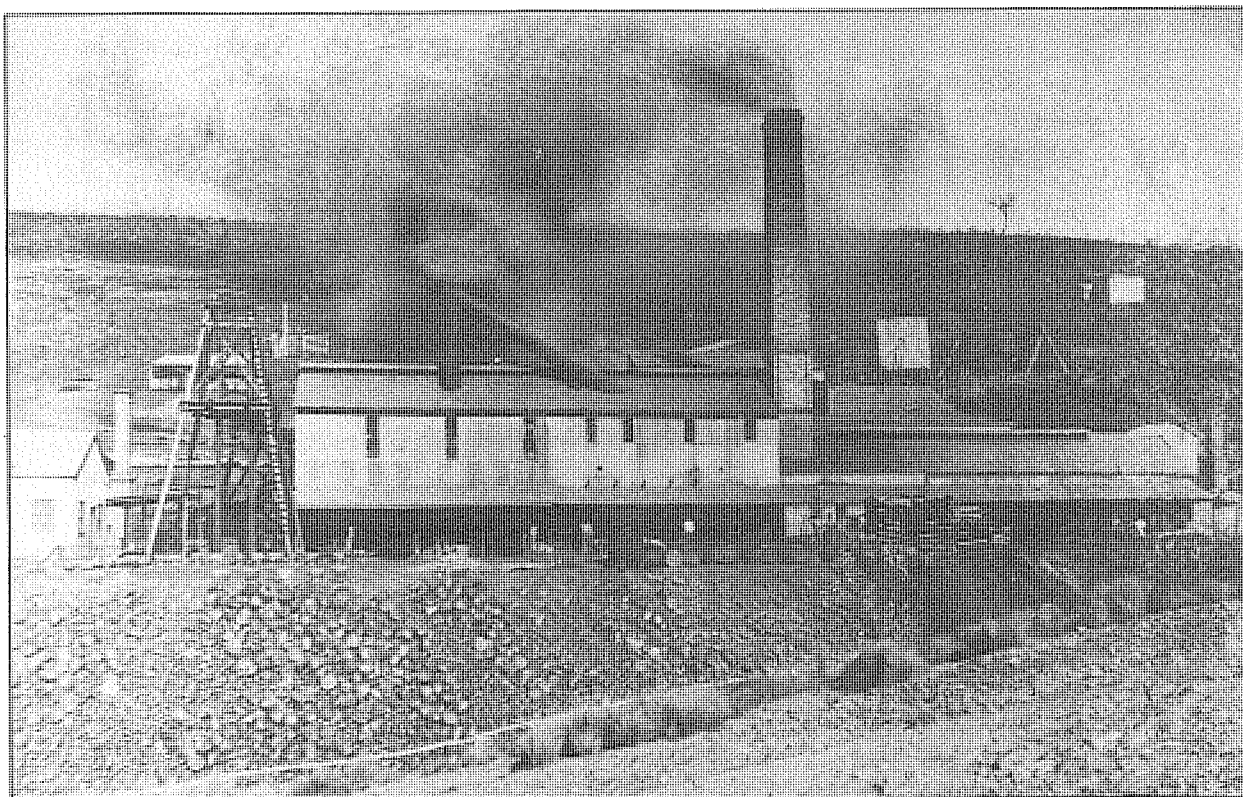
A newspaper report of 5th July, 1886 stated:

A new departure has been taken by the Silver King Company, by way of experiment. Instead of smelting the ore, so as to extract merely the gold and silver bullion, it has instead been 'matted'. The silver, gold, copper, zinc, arsenic, etc., are run into one mass, and sent to England for treatment. Thus the baser elements, which were formerly lost, are preserved, and the mode of extraction, requiring less scientific knowledge, is much cheaper.

This was the theory of it. In practise, little matte was produced in 1886. Prospecting continued at the mine in an attempt to determine the amount of the black mineral that was available, and if there was an economic quantity of it. In July 1886, gross mismanagement of the Silver King mine was alluded to in the *Bathurst Free Press and Mining Journal*. And Mr. Mynott, the principal refiner, took his departure for America. Both the *Bathurst Free Press and Mining Journal* and the Department of Mines considered that the situation at the Silver King mine was becoming rather mysterious, especially when the mine sold its stockpile of 500 tons of rich gossan ore to the Sunny Corner mine, while its own smelters remained idle.

For the whole of 1887, no mining or smelting was done at the Silver King

The Silver King mine, early 1886. Photo courtesy Bruce McPhail, Lithgow

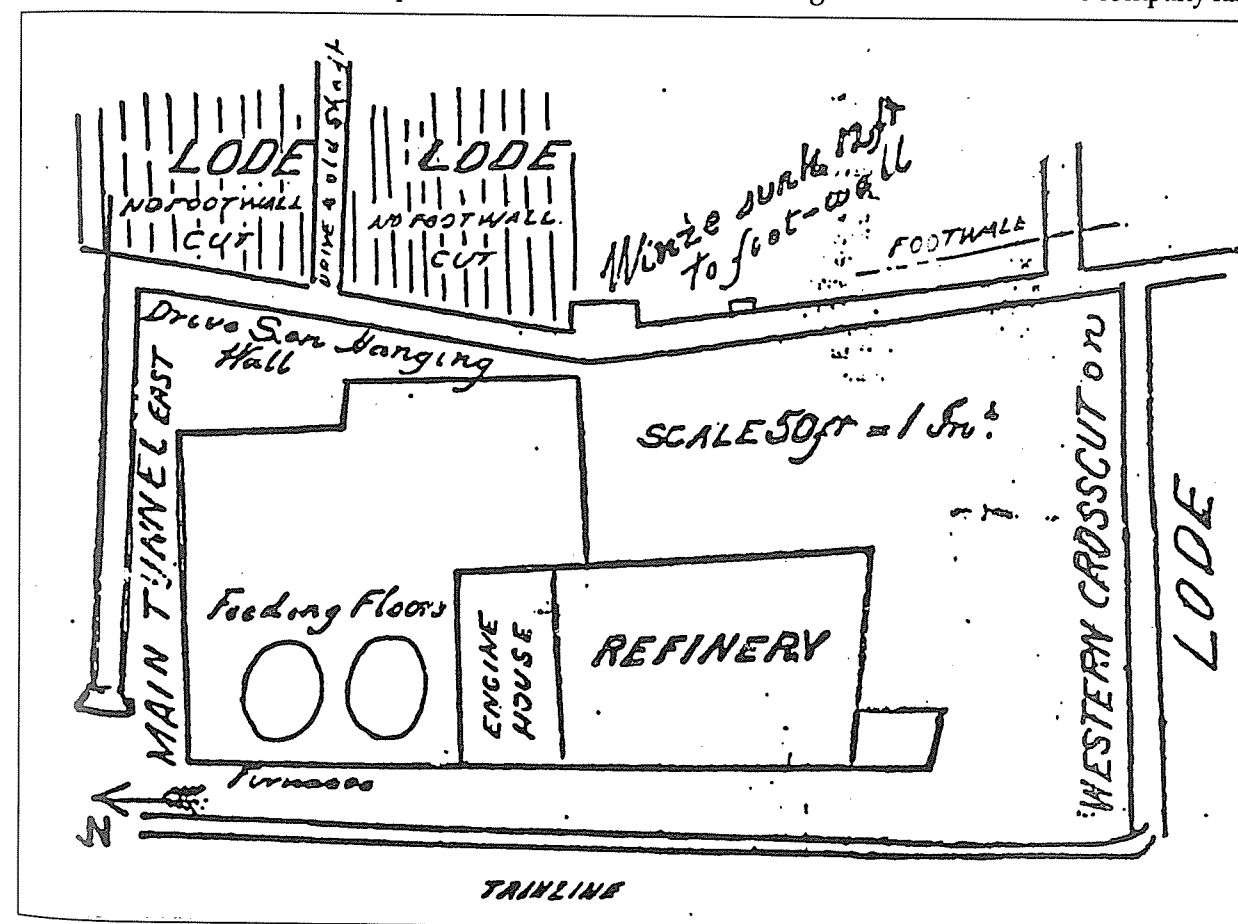


mine, although it was reported that the mine would shortly reopen. During 1887 the Department of Mines reported that the only work done at the mine was the installation of a milling plant (which had turned out to be a complete failure), and the removal of the furnaces. The company had also changed hands. There was also a bad storm in September of 1887 – a cottage at the Silver King mine was lifted right off its foundations and dropped with a crash nearby, smashing all the crockery and breakables inside.

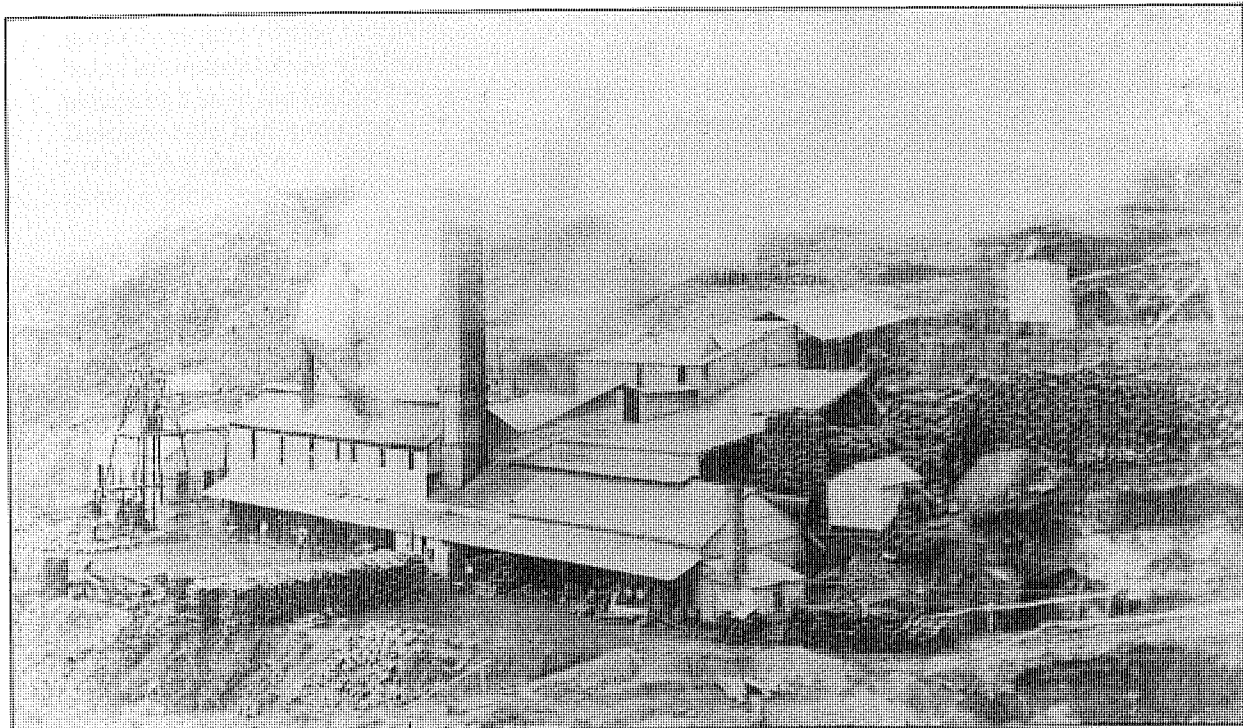
Towards the end of 1888 work recommenced and a fair quantity of matte was produced. It is not clear if the Gafford and Hogue furnaces were still being used, or if they really had been discarded as reported in 1887. Reports from 1889 indicate that the mine was having a most successful run, under the management of Charles Henry Richards (who also ran the furnaces at the Nevada mine). As many as 150 men were employed. There are several mentions of "new furnaces", so it seems that Mr. Gafford's furnaces did not have a very long run. This was probably due to the unsuitability of the ore rather than poor design. Gafford also tried to sell his patent furnaces around Broken Hill but was unsuccessful. There were three new furnaces in operation in 1889, all of water-jacket design, and mostly running out matte which was then sent elsewhere for refining.

Just as a profitable method had been found to treat the black mineral (the sulphide ore), the end of the Silver King lode was reached. The company had

Plan of the Silver King mine.  
From newspaper cutting,  
15.1.1886







The Silver King mine, early 1886. Photo courtesy Bruce McPhail, Lithgow

mined right along the lode until they came to the boundary line where their lease adjoined the Sunny Corner lease. There was still ore to be had, but it was on Sunny Corner's side of the fence! So a search began to find more ore on the Silver King property, but none was found. The mine closed down in about April of 1890 and all the men were sacked except for one lone prospector who stayed on for another year before the final abandonment of the Silver King mine.

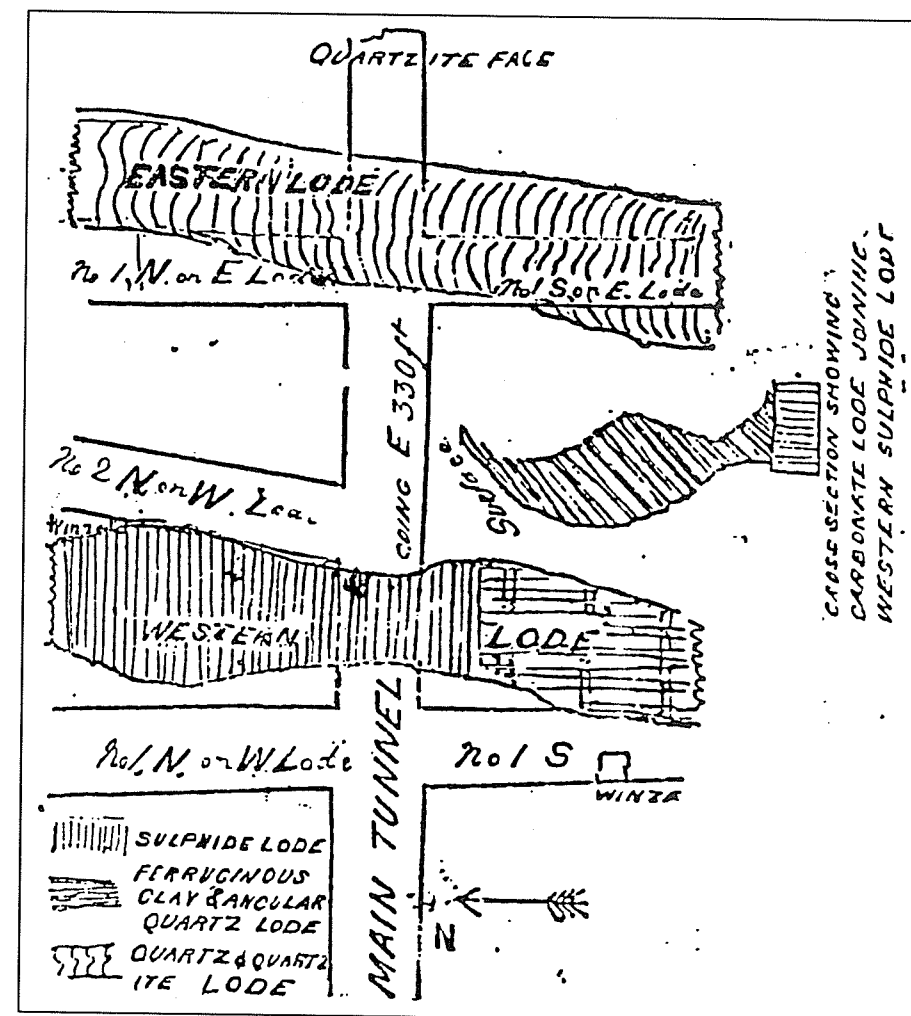
### NEVADA MINE

This mine was situated about two kilometres downstream from the Sunny Corner mine. It was worked from prior to 1884 up until 1892, with some subsequent minor workings. Very high hopes were first held for the Nevada, but there were difficulties with smelting the ore right from the start. A large amount of capital was poured into this mine as various experimental treatments were tried.

The mine was finally worked for its copper content, rather than for silver, and it prospered for several years before closing down at the end of 1892, probably due to low silver prices and a general recession.

The Nevada is unfortunately outside the boundary of the Sunny Corner Mine Historic Site and its historic values remain unprotected.

A 20 acre lease on the Nevada mine site was held during 1884 by the Hemsworth brothers, who uncovered a silver lode some 30 feet thick. They received an offer of several thousand pounds from Mr. La Monte and Mr. Thompson during August of 1884. Mr. La Monte was the American gentleman largely responsible for the start of successful smelting operations at the Sunny Corner silver mine in August of 1884. It seems that La Monte had come from



Plan of Nevada mine. From newspaper cutting, 13.1.1886

the state of Nevada in the U.S.A., so he named his new mine the Nevada, and on 16th September, 1884, the Nevada Silver Mining Company was formed with an issue of 80,000 shares of £1 each. The mine was believed to be on the same lode as the Sunny Corner mine, and the shares were rushed. Mr. La Monte too, was held in high regard as the only authority on silver mining in the colony, thus giving the mine added status – if La Monte thought it was a wonderful mine, his word must be believed!

A La Monte patent smelter was ordered (an improved Probert) and the various other associated works were begun. An assay house was built, a brick roasting furnace was constructed and the 40- to 60-ton capacity water-jacket smelting furnace was being built in Sydney by Mort and Co. The underground workings were also going on apace, in the charge of Mr. Prout who had introduced to the Nevada mine the square set method of stoping. This was the first time this system had been used in Australia; it had been used with great success in Californian mines and in the famous Comstock mine and was more effective and economical than the clumsy and old fashioned pigsty system which was in general use in Australian mines.

The setting up of the above ground works had taken longer than anticipated,

and meanwhile La Monte had become interested in the Broken Hill silver fields (which were only just being opened up). He sold out his share in the Nevada mine and invested instead at Broken Hill, leaving the mine in the charge of Mr. S.G. Humphries, described as being an expert assayer, a clever chemist and an accomplished minerologist with a practical knowledge of smelting and mining acquired in England and America.

The smelting furnace was started up on 1st October, 1885. After three days, Mr. Humphries was unfortunately taken ill and in his absence the smelter broke down. The ore had proved to be extremely difficult to smelt, it contained 40 per cent of silica, 8 per cent of copper and 8 per cent of sulphides. It was also being rumoured that the lode was pinching out (narrowing down to nothing), and so on the 20th October there was a lively meeting of shareholders of the Nevada Silver Mining Company, where all grievances were aired. The directors tried to persuade the shareholders that all was well, and that only a little more capital would put things right. The motion was put that:

...this meeting considers that the directors had not sufficient evidence to warrant the putting up of the smelter, and that the erection of the smelter was an injudicious piece of blundering, and further, that the shareholders feel no confidence in the directors, and that they be called upon to resign.

Cheering then broke out – the chairman and all the directors resigned, as well as Mr. Humphries. Shares had dropped from thirty-eight shilling to three shillings and a wave of panic surged through the investing public, who up until then had regarded the fledgling silver mining industry in New South Wales to be infallible – they had invested millions of pounds in the silver mines of both Sunny Corner and the Barrier Ranges. The problems of the Nevada mine had a sobering influence on these investors.

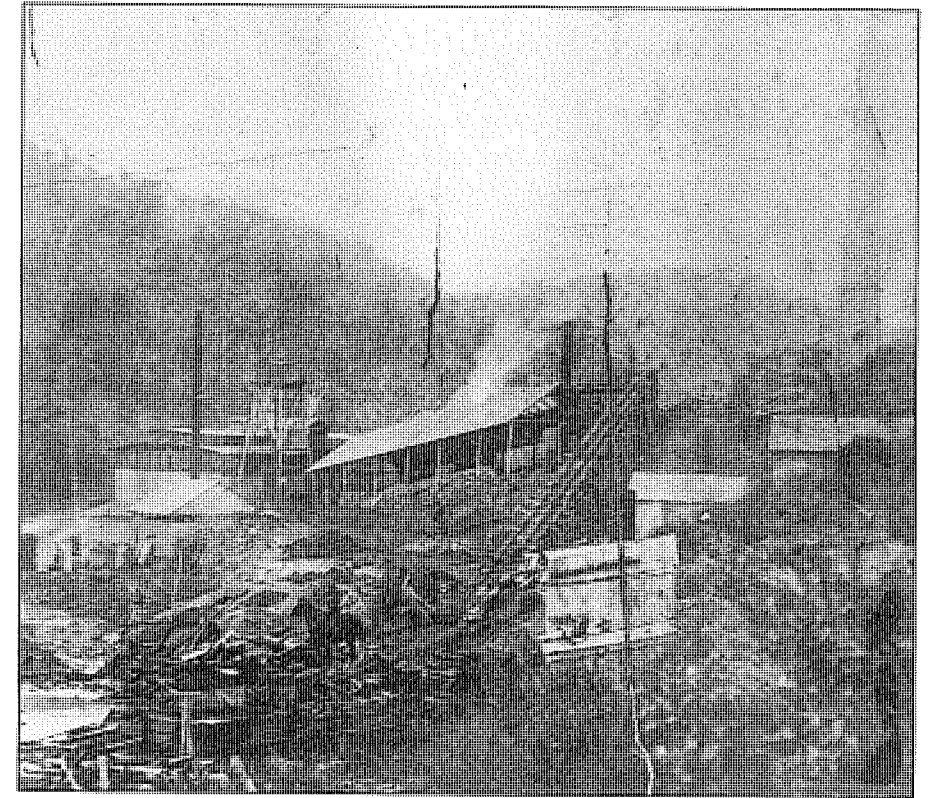
It was further discovered that the brick roasting furnace had been badly built and was beginning to collapse, but the shareholders decided to form a new company, and to try and make the mine payable. By the beginning of 1886 a fresh start was made at the Nevada. Oscar Fabricius, a Norwegian gentleman with many years of experience in ore treatment in Europe, was engaged to treat the ores of the Nevada, using the European system.

There must have once been an enormous amount of equipment at the Nevada. Already there was a roasting furnace 46 feet long by 12 feet 6 inches wide, a La Monte patent water-jacket furnace, a 5.5 horsepower Baker blower driven by an American engine, an iron flue two feet-six inches in diameter which ran horizontal for 20 feet, downwards for another 10 feet before connecting to an inclined flume leading to a chimney stack. The upper part of this flume was constructed of logs and some of these had already burnt through. The site of the Nevada chimney is not known.

Mr. Fabricius then went on to install more equipment. A new dam was built, there was a tank of 1200 gallons, sheds were built and also a concentrating room, roasting kilns, a roasting furnace (rebuilt), a reverberatory furnace and two German furnaces to replace the La Monte furnace. A new brick flue was also built.

A new method of treatment was devised as reported on 11th March, 1886: The ore is crushed, ground fine and concentrated on shaking tables, thus washing all earthy matter away. It is then roasted, and the zinc and copper extracted by the wet process, leaving the lead containing the gold and silver behind; these are smelted and cupelled in a German cupel requiring no

Probably the Nevada mine.  
Photo courtesy Bruce McPhail,  
Lithgow



bone ash. In short, all the metals are extracted in marketable form, and nothing but the coke necessary for smelting purchased, all other materials being found on the mine. The flue dust is collected in a patent water spray condenser, so that not 1% of the volatilised metal will escape. The whole cost of additional plant and alterations required is put down at £2,700. The process adopted is exactly that by which similar ores are treated in Europe.

It was quite a different system to that being used at the Sunny Corner mine.

This system is reported to have worked successfully for a number of months, but shortly after the start of a new brick smelting furnace in September of 1886, Mr. Fabricius also "took ill" and left the mine. Mr. Edwards took over – he had been for eighteen years manager of Eyton Brothers Smelting and Desilvering Works at Hollywell, Wales. The brick smelting furnace was converted back to a water-jacket furnace in early 1887 so there were obviously still some problems in the treatment of the ore. In May of 1887, in the middle of running trials with the new furnace, Mr. Edwards died at Havenhand's Hotel in Sunny Corner. Work was completely stopped at the Nevada mine for the rest of the year and by May of 1888 the leases had been cancelled.

A syndicate took over the mine for a short time – they called themselves the Mount Mitchell Silver Mining Co. But by 1889 the mine was known as the Phoenix Silver Mining Company. Alterations were made to the smelting plant by Mr. Richards who was successfully treating the ores of the Silver King mine. Some underground work was also done, but again in 1890 the mine changed hands, and Mr. Lewis Lloyd became the new owner. Lloyd was an experienced copper smelter, and he ran the Eskbank Smelting Works in Lithgow. He paid

£3,000 for the Nevada mine which was described on 14th April, 1891 in the *Bathurst Free Press and Mining Journal* as follows:

At the old Nevada you'll see steam engines, water jacket furnaces, tramways, stonebreakers, and all sorts of mining appliances, some under sheds partly covered from the weather, some necessarily rotting in the open air. There they lie, a monument of extravagance and ignorance.

The Nevada mine, it was added, had from its commencement gone through an uninterrupted course of failure. Even so, £3,000 was seen as a bargain. The mine was well opened out underground and the value of the plant was considerable. This of course was in hindsight, after Mr. Lloyd began to make large profits!

Lewis Lloyd decided that the Nevada (Phoenix) should be worked as a copper mine instead of a silver mine. He sent about half of the ore that he mined to his Lithgow smelting works, and smelted the other half at the mine site. He was producing copper matte and shipping it to Europe where it sold well. Copper matte comprised of a sort of half digested copper-rich metal, containing many impurities; it was purchased by the smelting houses of Swansea (Wales) and Freiberg (Germany) where it was then refined. The ore was first roasted in the open air to get rid of some of the sulphur, and then it was smelted in either a blast furnace or a reverberatory furnace to produce the copper matte. Such a simple system, said the investors who had lost heavily in the earlier days of the Nevada, their mine having been sold for a mere trifle.

Lloyd ran the mine for about three years and seems to have made a good profit. But in 1893 the mine was quite idle. There had been a sharp drop in the price of silver and a worldwide recession during 1892, and it seems most likely that this was the cause of the mine's failure. For the next eight years the Nevada lay abandoned.

In 1901 there was a brief burst of activity when the Sunny Corner mine acquired the Nevada and connected the two mines with a tramline about two kilometres long which ran alongside Daylight Creek. The mine was unwatered and retimbered and ore was mined once more. This was then tramlined up to the Sunny Corner smelters and mixed with the Sunny Corner ores. This could not have been successful as by the following year both the Nevada and the Sunny Corner mine were closed.

J. Hemsworth did some prospecting at the Nevada in 1903, maybe the very same Mr. Hemsworth who had originally sold the mine to La Monte and others for, it was said, £10,000. Hemsworth came on a lode of quartz and planned to re-open the mine as a gold mine, but nothing seems to have come of this. In 1913 the mine was again prospected, probably by the Zinc Corporation, but the mine's prospects were said to be very poor.

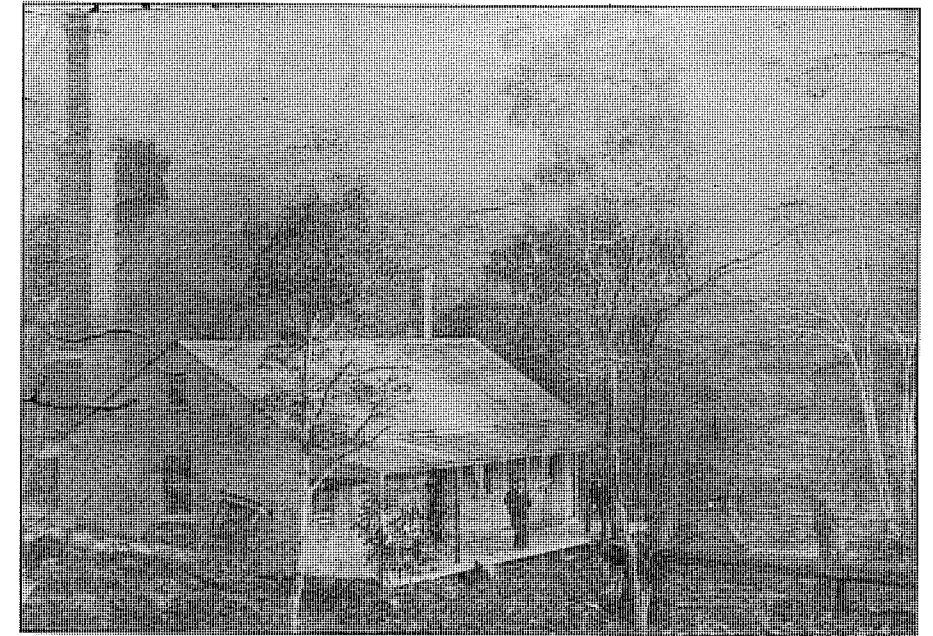
In 1919 the Nevada was taken over by W.B. Wilkinson, who also held the lease of the Sunny Corner mine. He mined some of the Nevada ore and treated it. After 1919 the Nevada seems to have been abandoned. It was never reopened. All the plant was removed but there is still evidence on the site of some of the processes that took place.

On 13th January, 1886, a newspaper reporter described one of the routes down to the Nevada mine:

After leaving the Sunny Corner mine, I led my horse by steep and devious ways along a narrow track which winds along Daylight Creek. I must say

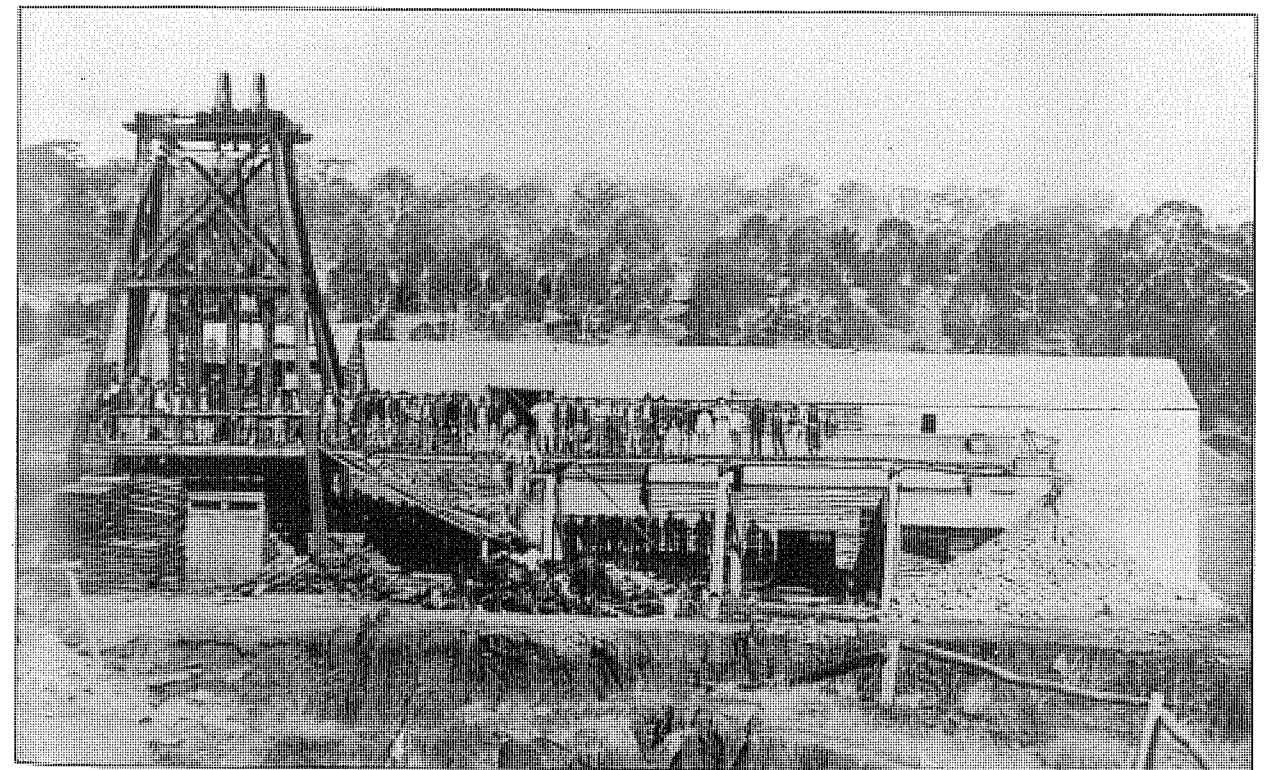
that it is somewhat a misnomer to associate this creek so prominently with daylight. It runs at the bottom of a darksome glen, on both sides of which are steep hills covered with stout timber and peppermint scrub.

Today, Daylight Creek is badly polluted but the bush is still there, probably rather more thinned out and scrubby than it was in 1886.



At right: Assay office, probably at the Nevada mine. Photo courtesy Bruce McPhail, Lithgow

Below: Probably the Nevada mine. Photo courtesy Magill family, Bathurst





## GREAT WESTERN MINE

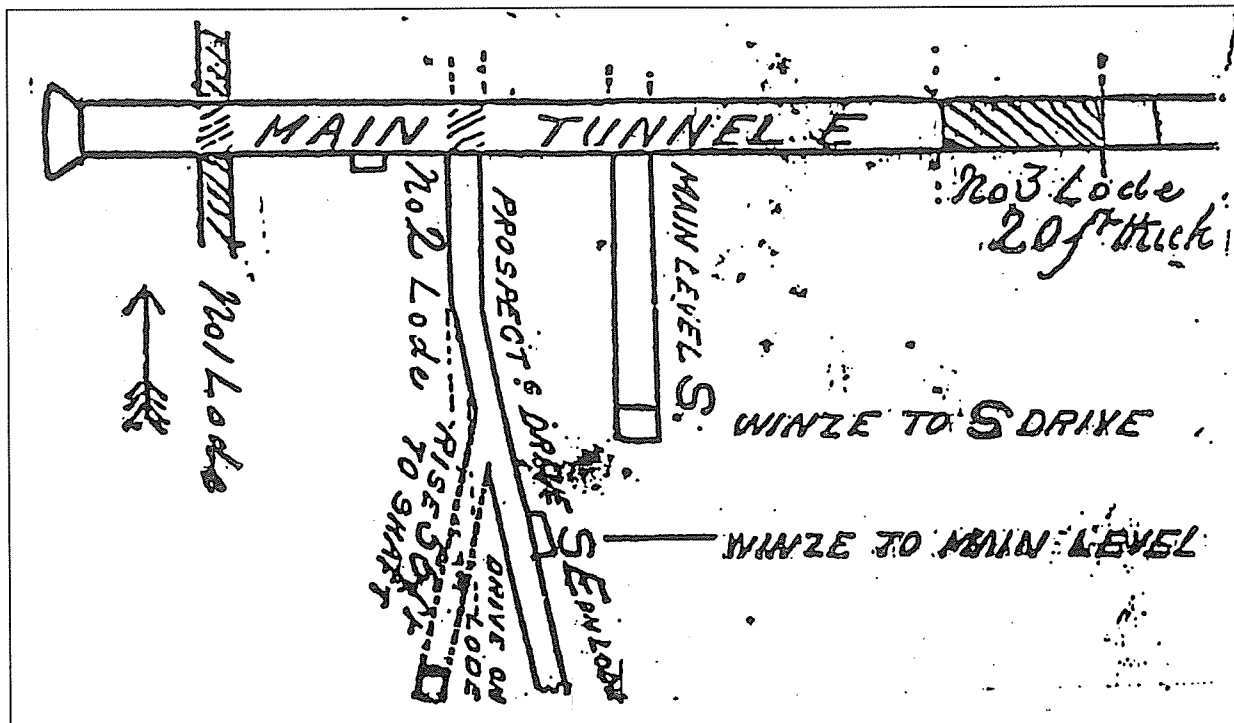
The Great Western Silver Mining Company began as a 60-acre lease known as mining lease No. 70. This lease was just north of the Sunny Corner mine, on the hill next to it. The main tunnel can still be seen today, partly obscured by pine trees, several hundred metres north of the brick chimney stack. The tunnel is right on the boundary line of the lease. Today, portion 70 is private property and not part of the historic reserve.

This mine was taken up in 1884 by John Shepherd, who also held large interests in the Sunny Corner mine. In February of 1886 the Great Western was considered to be one of the four principal mines of the district, along with the Silver King, Sunny Corner and Nevada mines, which all ran in a line. In April, 1886, the *Bathurst Free Press and Mining Journal* reported that the Great Western would be "the mine of the district" after wonderful specimens of native silver had been found in the mine. These specimens, along with those of rich galena and chlorides of lead were "a sight to inspire confidence in the most sceptical".

It is quite likely that all the ore produced from the Great Western was smelted at the Sunny Corner smelters. The main tunnel extended to 552 feet, and a lode 20 feet thick was cut. This contained silver, lead, copper pyrites and a trace of gold. No figures are available on the amount of silver produced from the Great Western, but compared to the Sunny Corner mine, it would have been a small amount.

By 1887, the Great Western had ceased mining and was to remain idle from then on. Further drilling in 1969 failed to find any high grade mineralization in the vicinity of this mine. Mr. M. Marshall and Mr. M. Johnston were both mining managers at this mine during the 1880s.

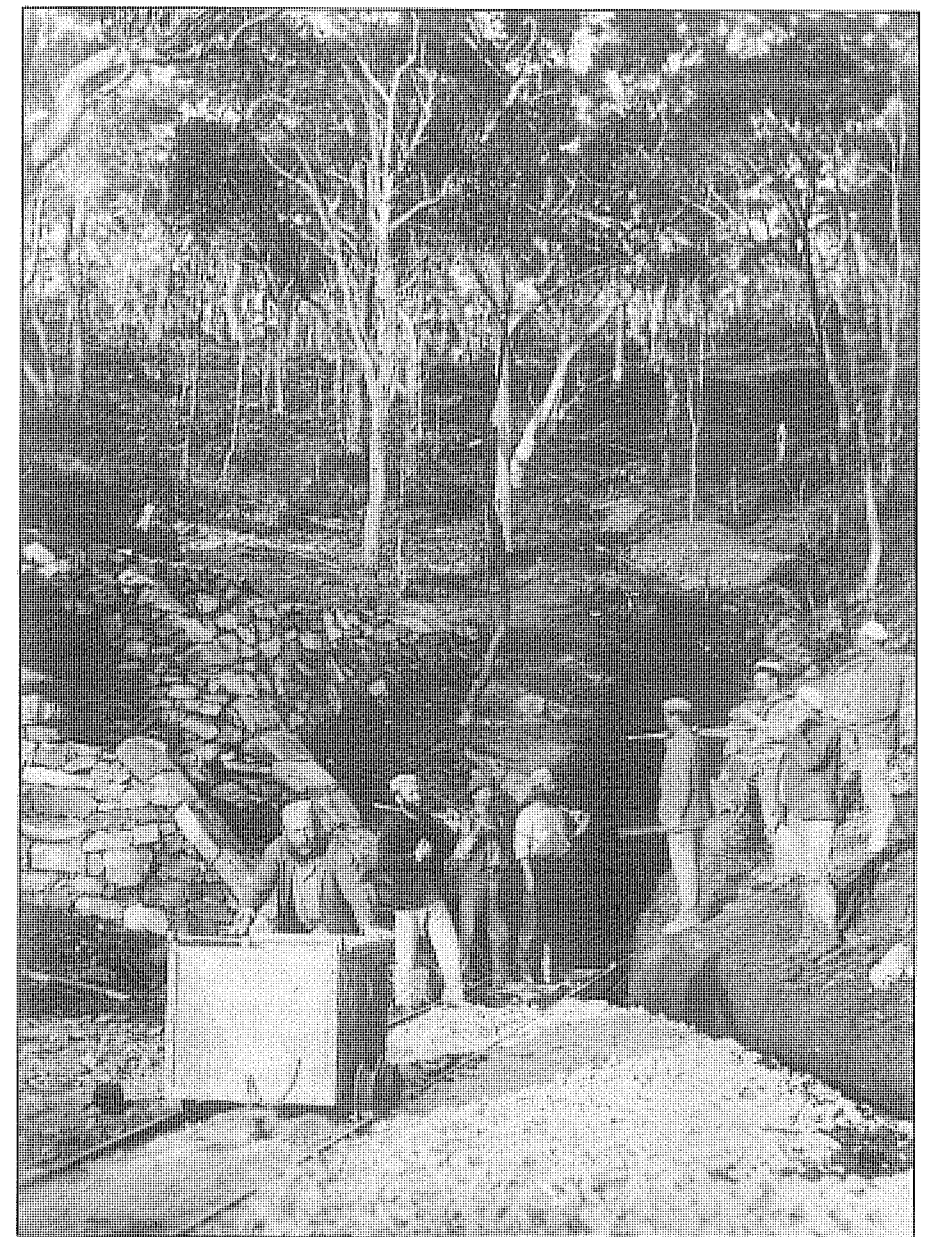
Plan of Great Western mine.  
From newspaper cutting,  
February 1886



## TONKIN'S MINE

Below is an excellent photograph of Tonkin's mine, taken in 1884, showing the main tunnel and a group of miners. Today the scene is still recognisable – the stonework at the tunnel entrance has collapsed, and the miners have long since gone, but the trees in the background appear to be very similar. This mine is situated about half-way along the track which leads from the town of Sunny Corner to the Silver King mine.

James Ebenezer Tonkin first took up the lease in November of 1883 and was financed by a Sydney syndicate. The first mine manager was Mr. Ambrose



Tonkin's mine, Sunny Corner,  
October 1884. Photo courtesy  
Mitchell Library, Sydney

Johnson J.P., an intelligent old Dane who had mining experience from Victoria, Queensland and New South Wales. The owners of Tonkin's mine were hopeful of striking the main lode which they considered may have extended on up from the Sunny Corner mine. They did strike a minor vein of rich galena which kept their hopes high for a while. But the main lode was confined to the Sunny Corner mine, and Tonkin's mine just gradually faded away. Mr. Tonkin had also held a nearby lease, No. 13, on which was built the public smelter.

Tonkin's mine re-emerged in 1906 until 1910 as the Montana copper mine, although it appears that little copper was ever found.

James Tonkin himself became a member of parliament in 1889 for the East Macquarie electorate. For years he had fought a bitter struggle against the sitting member John Shepherd (of Sunny Corner mine fame). Tonkin accused Shepherd of vote buying, and Tonkin was accused of being in the pay of the squatters. In 1892 Tonkin was declared bankrupt and was forced to resign from Parliament, although he was again re-elected. In 1895 he was defeated by William Hurley, the former mine manager of the Sunny Corner mine. (Mr. Copeland of the Silver Hill mine was also a member of parliament, as was John Hurley – Sunny Corner certainly had its share of politicians!)

#### PUBLIC SMELTER

The public smelter was situated behind the present recreation ground, on Mining Lease 13. A few bricks mark the spot today.

In March 1885, Mr. Tonkin held the lease, and had made arrangements with Holterman and Icke for the erection of a smelter which could be used by the public, that is, the smaller mines which did not have their own smelters would be able to bring their silver-ore to the public smelter to have it treated.

The company which owned the smelter was known as the Great Mitchell Extended Silver Mining Company. The smelter was of a quite different design to those used by the Sunny Corner company. It was called a German air-jacket smelter. This type of furnace had iron "jackets" into which air could be forced, instead of water as with the water-jacket furnaces, the idea of cooling the sides of the furnace was of course to stop the furnace itself from melting during the smelting of the ores, which required great heat.

This public smelter worked well in principle. At least £2,000 had been invested in its construction. But its downfall was the bricks which lined the inside of the furnace, described as poor quality colonial-made bricks. Top quality fire-bricks were unobtainable, and the bricks used just melted in the furnace. Every two days of running, the bricks had to be replaced, when the furnace should have been able to stay in blast for weeks at a time.

This smelter had commenced working by late 1885. Five hundred tons of ore was purchased from the Sunny Corner silver mine, to commence operations. In early 1886, some bricks had been imported from Belgium but this must have been quite costly. The public smelter was a failure and by 1887 the whole of the smelting plant and buildings were sold to the Sunny Corner Silver Mining Company, who removed everything onto their own property.

It should also be noted that, of all the smelters working at Sunny Corner in 1885, the public smelter was said to be the worst as far as poisonous fumes were concerned. The Department of Mines reported: "the sight of a man feeding this furnace with his mouth covered made me suspect that it was only

a matter of time when such work would kill the strongest man alive". The Great Mitchell Extended Silver Mining Company were also mining on their lease, but the results were poor.

Names associated with Mining Lease 13 were:

Tonkin and Garland, 1885

Mitchell Company, 1886-7

Graves and Waters, 1889-90

#### LESSER SILVER MINES OF SUNNY CORNER – MOSTLY 1885

After the big four mines comprising of Sunny Corner, Silver King, Nevada and Great Western, there were a large number of lesser mines, most not lasting more than a year or so. All the Sunny Corner silver mining companies and syndicates are now listed:

Sunny Corner Silver Mining Company  
Silver King Silver Mining Company  
Silver Queen Silver Mining Company  
Silver Prince Silver Mining Company  
Silver Hill Company  
Silver Star Mine  
Great Western Silver Mining Company  
Nevada Silver Mining Company  
Cornstalk Silver Mining Company  
Victoria Silver Mining Company  
Tonkin's Silver Mining Company  
Bulldog Mine  
Inches Bonanza  
Central Mine  
Smith's Mine  
Farnsworths Mine  
Mineral Hill  
Honest John Mine  
Great Britain Mine  
General Gordon Mine  
Dog Trap Creek Mine  
Garland's Lease  
Tasker's Lode  
British Lion Mine  
Frieberg Tunnel  
Monte Christo Mine  
Independent Mine

There may have been others, and there were also numerous gold mines, mentioned elsewhere.

The Silver Queen – This mining company held three adjoining mining leases, just to the east of the Sunny Corner mine. Their prospects were considered most favourable as it was thought that the main lode extended onto the property of the Silver Queen. This was in 1885, and the Silver Queen company sank a number of shafts and tunnels on their leases. They found plenty of mineralized rock, which kept them hopeful. However by April of

1887, they had gone broke – they never did find a large body of ore and all their machinery was sold up by the bailiff. Mr. Hurley bought the lot for £55. The mining leases held were numbers 17, 45 and 53, all now private property.

The Silver Hill – This mine was owned by Mr. Copeland M.P. It was said on 19th August, 1885 that the ground was “studded with cubes of galena and mundic, and a green copper stain”.

Cornstalk – On this lease of 1885, it was stated on 3rd September, 1885, that it was “a lode well worthy of development”.

Silver Star – This mine had found “quartz leaders and mundic cubes”, it was stated on 28th August, 1885, and they expected to meet the Nevada lode.

Victoria – This company found mundic and galena in 1885.

Inches Bonanza – was situated between the Silver Queen and Silver King mines.

The Bulldog Mine – had issued 90,000 shares, and were situated one mile northeast of Nevada mine, whose lode they hoped to strike. The lease was 140 acres.

The Independent – was northeast of the Great Western.

Mineral Hill – adjoined the Independent.

Honest John – adjoined Mineral Hill to the northeast and comprised of 240 acres.

Great Britain – was southeast of Honest John.

General Gordon – comprised of 60 acres and adjoined Great Britain.

Dog Trap Creek Company – was a mile east of the Silver King.

Garland's Lease – was 90 acres just east of Sunny Corner township.

The Silver Prince – adjoined the Silver Queen.

Tasker's Lode – south of Sunny Corner.

British Lion – south of Sunny Corner.

Frieburg Tunnel – south of Sunny Corner.

All of the above mines were operational in 1885.

### GOLD MINES OF SUNNY CORNER AND DARK CORNER

There were once many gold mines in the Sunny Corner district. Gold had caused the first settlement here before silver mining took over. Then as the silver mines failed, gold mines were reopened again, and during the Depression years the search for gold was again renewed with many fossickers in the district anxious to make a living. The gold is now completely worked out although an occasional discovery is still sometimes made. The gold fossicker may find specks of gold by panning the local creeks, while larger companies continue to search the area for a new deposit.

#### *Mitchell's Creek*

Alluvial gold was first noticed in Mitchell's Creek during the 1850s, after gold had been first discovered at Ophir, Hill End and Sofala. Miners and fossickers travelling through to the Turon River goldfields thought the country around Mitchell's Creek looked similar to other gold bearing areas and so they tried their luck panning for gold. Their success brought a gold rush to the area. At first the fossickers obtained their gold by washing the gravel in the creeks for alluvial gold, but after a time the alluvial gold became scarce. Stamper

batteries then made their appearance. Gold bearing quartz rock was collected from miles around and was carted by horse and bullock teams to the stamper batteries. There were about twelve batteries at one time. In the earliest times, this quartz was first burned in kilns of 60-ton capacity to make it more brittle and easier to crush. The quartz was roasted for three days and this entailed the use of a tremendous amount of wood. The kilns were cut into the hillsides and were about 15 feet square – they could still be seen in the 1930s long after they had been abandoned. The method was not completely satisfactory as ashes and charcoal became mixed up with the quartz, and the miners also feared that the gold would become coated with silica which would prevent its collection on the amalgamation plates of the batteries.

The introduction of harder metal into the stampers meant that the roasting could be dispensed with and the quartz crushed “raw”. Nearly every battery was fitted with an endless belt containing buckets for elevating and returning the water which was used over and over again.

In the early 1860s, Mr. Donald Campbell was one of the principal mining men at Mitchell's Creek, and he had several stamper batteries working. It was said that he made £35,000 from gold at Mitchell's Creek area. To put this amount into today's perspective, Mr. Campbell would have found about 12,000 ounces of gold (taking the 1860 price at £3 an ounce). This same amount of gold today would be worth about \$6 million (taking gold at approximately \$500 an ounce in 1989).

#### *Big Hill*

When the surface quartz became scarce, the miners started to dig tunnels and shafts to reach the veins of gold-bearing quartz which ran through Big Hill and Little Hill. It had been the gold from these hills that had washed down to form the alluvial deposits in the creeks.

But by 1875 the rush for gold was well and truly over. There was only one gold miner remaining at Mitchell's Creek, and this was Mr. F. Robertson who was still crushing quartz with his stamper battery. He sold all his machinery in 1881 to Mr. Henry Giles Brown. Mr. Brown ran the post office store at Meadow Flat in those days, as well as having mining interests. During 1881, Mr. Brown and his sons were mining quartz on Big Hill and crushing it at Mitchell's Creek.

Brown's 20 acre lease at Big Hill was in 1884 known as the N.S.W. Band and Albion Gold Mine. It was worked by adit (tunnel) and trams, and they had a mill with five stamps run by a 10-horsepower steam engine – they also did crushing for the smaller companies which adjoined them. (H.G. Brown and Sons also held, in 1884, the Bulldog mine at Sunny Corner.)

There were quite a number of leases held on Big Hill and Little Hill, and these were to change hands quite often in the coming years. In 1888, John Shepherd M.P. and Mr. Johnson had taken over Brown's Band and Albion mine, a large crushing plant was erected and eighteen men were employed.

Adjoining the Band and Albion on Big Hill was another gold mine known as the Hidden Treasure. It had originally been known as Yorkey's Claim, then sold to Mr. J.M. Smith for £3,000, then sold again to a Sydney company. In October 1884 it was held by Messrs. Murray and Lean, and in 1885 by Messrs. Mooney, Radbourne & Co. It was described as 15 acres with good prospects,



with a steam winding engine, crushing plant and large dam at the mouth of the mine. Murray and Lean may have taken this mine up again, as there are many records of Murray and Lean working a mine at the Big Hill in subsequent years. It is also possible that the Band and Albion and the Hidden Treasure may have become the one mine, as later references only name one large mine at Big Hill.

Charles Murray had various mining interests as well as being a hotel proprietor. He ran a hotel at Mitchell's Creek before moving to Lewis Ponds. While at Lewis Ponds he took up a mining lease with Henry Brown at Icely, which was just near Lewis Ponds, where Murray had a hotel. Murray later moved back to Sunny Corner (where he ran a hotel in the town), and he also dabbled in gold mining ventures. Richard Lean was a prominent Sunny Corner citizen who ran a general store and was involved in gold mining at both Sunny Corner and Dark Corner. He was the engineer at the Paddy Lackey gold mine.

By 1891 there were grand plans for the mine at Big Hill. It was now owned by Mr. Trewenack, recently the manager at the Sunny Corner silver mine. Mr. Trewenack intended to erect a large battery, and to extend the underground workings. It is not known how long Mr. Trewenack held the Big Hill lease, but by 1898 Murray and Lean again owned the main part of the Big Hill. The mine was being worked on tribute, which meant that the miners would raise the stone, and then claim one half of the value of the gold obtained after Murray and Lean had crushed the stone. The miners were said to have made very good wages from this.

A *Sydney Morning Herald* reporter in 1898 calculated that over 14,000 ounces of gold may have been won from the Big Hill over forty years, although no records had been kept. This same amount of gold would be worth today some \$7 million.

A number of other miners worked smaller claims at Big Hill, and their names included:- McLachlan, Loth, Mounter, Lord, Laurie, Carr, Zobel, Considine, Cook, Attuell.

The Big Hill mine was worked fairly consistently up to 1914, when very low production caused the mine to close. In 1933 Tom Hutchinson held the Big Hill lease, and he also installed a battery, the only one which still stands at Sunny Corner. It is situated next to the road which leads to the old Sunny Corner mine. More recently, exploration leases have been held on Big Hill by a local mining syndicate (Blands, Yetholme).

#### *Little Hill and Frenchman's Reef*

The reef on Little Hill was described as small, but rich, and it was worked by many different people. In 1885, Shepherd and Hurley (from the Sunny Corner silver mine) took up large leases at Little Hill, which included a large portion of the earlier diggings of the 1860s and 1870s. Others who worked Little Hill over the years were:- Samuel Roberts, Carr, Turner, Odgers, Sparks, McKellar, Browne, Gant, Duggan, McKenzie, Doyle and the Coronation Syndicate.

Frenchman's Reef adjoined Little Hill, and was variously referred to as French's Reef, Frenchy's Mine and Frenchy's Little Hill. By 1906 the reef was completely mined out and the mine was then abandoned. Some of the people who worked Frenchman's Reef were:- Cook, Murray, Rickard, Bond, O'Dell, Turner, Lean, Odgers, Hoskins.

#### *Monte Christo and Bob's Creek*

The Monte Christo mine was situated on Bob's Creek on Mining Lease 129. A reef had been found there in 1886 and it contained copper, iron pyrites, silver and gold. This find was said to be "extraordinarily good news"; the lode was considered permanent and the ore seemed rich. A company was planned and 2,000 shares were offered locally. The directors were McIntosh, Rigby, Hurley, Rogers and Bulkeley, all local identities. The mine manager was Mr. Marshall. By April of 1887 only some of the 2,000 shares had been sold, and the company went into liquidation. The Monte Christo was then never mentioned again in Department of Mines reports, but it is possible that the mine changed name and ownership. In later years, a number of men worked mines for gold on Bob's Creek.

Bob's Creek runs into Mitchell's Creek and was an active gold mining area. Mr. Holman had a successful mine and a five-stamper battery in the 1890s, and Mr. John Charleston on an adjoining lease planned a ten-stamper battery. Also in the 1890s was the Federal Mine and the Moonlight Claim. The Sunny Corner Silver mine had closed in the 1890s, and this was a time when many men turned to gold mining. Names associated with Bob's Creek mines were:- Holman, Charleston, McKenzie Brothers, Bourke, Murphy, Weinert, Anderson (who had a small cyanide plant), W.H. Lord, Price, Millen and Thomas. In 1933 the lessee of Bob's Creek Mine was J.S. Murray, who was putting in a new tunnel. In the 1880s were Dr. Watt's lease and Sugarloaf Hill.

Some other gold mines of the Sunny Corner district were:

- Turpins Gully, five miles east of Sunny Corner, G.A. Moore, 1905
- Bushrangers Hill, Portland Goldmining Syndicate, 1911
- Bullecourt Mining Syndicate, Turpins Gully, 1919
- Bushranger Mine, Turpins Creek, Toyer and party, 1919
- Wee Jean Gold Mining Syndicate, Bushranger Mountain, 1924
- T.A. Hutchinson, Mitchells Creek, 1932, 1933
- G. Stait and party, West Mitchell, 1932, 1933
- J.T. Chapman, Daylight Creek, 1932
- R. Frew, Sunny Corner, 1933

#### *Lagoon Creek*

In 1886 there was something of a rush to Lagoon Creek, after Mr. McNeil found gold there. Seventy men were making a good living, and claims were changing hands for £250. Small nuggets were being found. Names mentioned were Riley, Beattie, Yankee Tom, Robertson and of course Mr. McNeil.

By 1891 it was thought that a good gold reef existed there. Mr. J. Mitchell was the manager of the Lagoon Mine in 1895. He had forty men employed, shafts and drives in progress, boiler, engine and sawmill on site, and plans for a chlorination plant to treat the fine gold. Adjoining mines were the John Bright Reef (McLachlan brothers), and the Lagoon Extended (Mr. Pratt).

About the beginning of 1897, the Lagoon mine changed its name to The Lagoon Creek Gold Mining Company. £17,000 was spent on crushing and cyanide plants. This amount of money today would be worth over \$3 million. John Kemp Charleston was the consulting engineer, and the mine was financed by the American millionaire Frank Lacroix Gardner, who was also financing Charleston's work at the Sunny Corner silver mine. In 1897 a

Bathurst newspaper said that the Lagoon Creek gold mining plant when complete would be one of the largest and most up to date in the colony of New South Wales. The *Sydney Morning Herald* said that the hopes of the Sunny Corner residents had been raised almost to fever heat, the Lagoon Creek mine was to be the salvation for the community which had been plagued by mine closures for many years. All those men out of work would find work at Lagoon Creek Gold Mine.

But the Lagoon Creek Mine failed because it ran out of gold. The simple matter of being certain that there was plenty of gold in the mine had somehow been overlooked! Three gold reefs at the mine contained only patchy gold, and the reefs were not continuous. No more reefs were found and the company went broke.

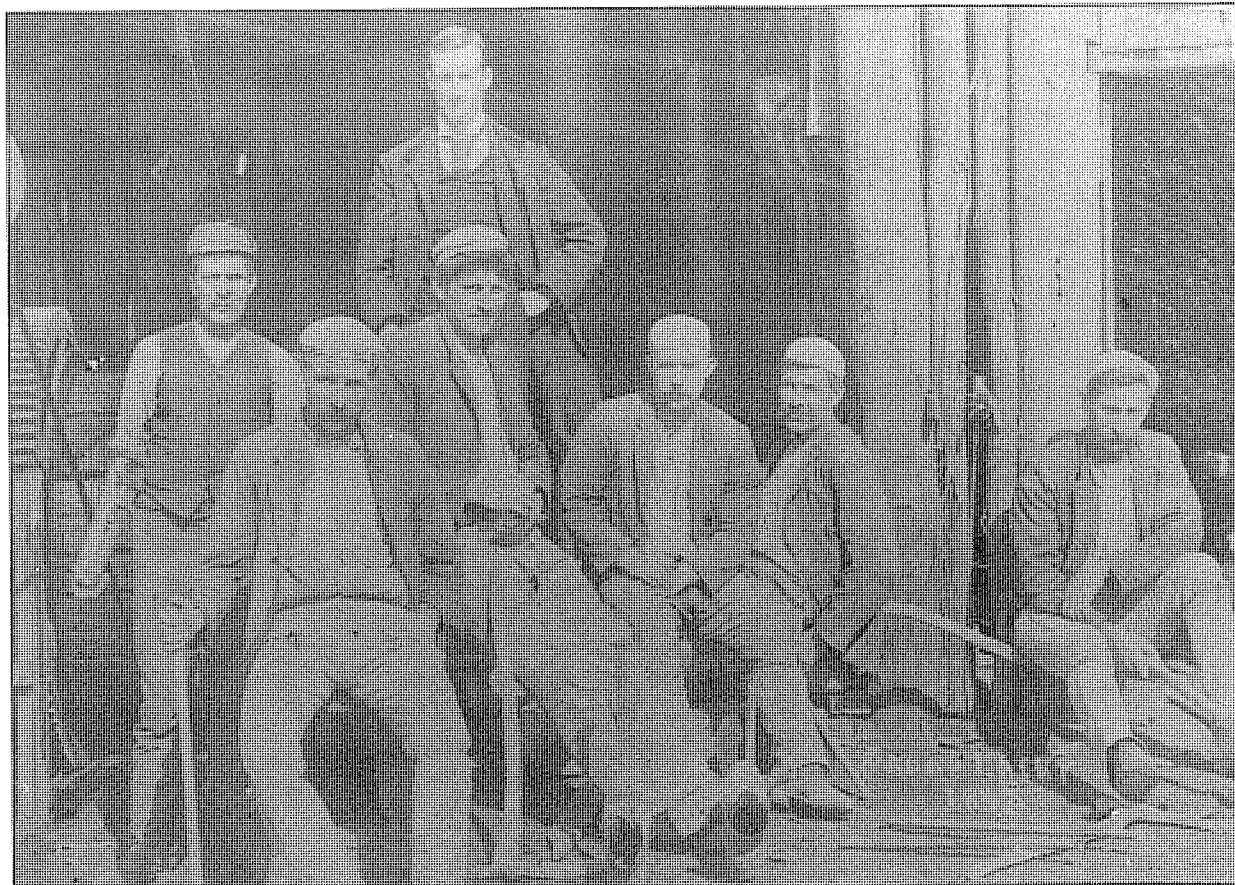
All that remains of the workings of this mine are two concrete dams built by John Charleston, situated in the steep gully of Lagoon Creek.

Paddy Lackey miners, 1895. Standing: Norm Poyitt, L-R: Richard Lean, Mac Scott, J. Cook, George Williams, Charles Cook and Ted Eves. Photo by Henry Havenhand, Nyngan, courtesy Col Wilkinson, Sunny Corner

#### *Paddy Lackey Gold Mine, Dark Corner*

Paddy Lackey was an Irishman. His real name was Patrick Lahy. Over the years the gold mine that he discovered was always known as the Paddy Lackey, even after it had changed hands several times.

Paddy first discovered his gold reef at Dark Corner in the late 1860s. He used a one-horsepower revolving battery to crush the quartz, and he made a



Paddy Lackey gold mine, Dark Corner, 1895. Photo by Henry Havenhand, Nyngan, courtesy Col Wilkinson, Sunny Corner

good living out of this for several years, but then he and his sons left the mine, and ultimately it was abandoned.

Perhaps about 1870, Donald Campbell and party worked the mine for several years, then finally abandoned it due to an excess of water in the mine. This reef then remained idle for about nine years. Paddy was still living in the district, but by then he was an old man, and had apparently lost all interest in the reef. He died at Sunny Corner in 1881, and is buried in Kirkconnell cemetery.

About 1882, John Cook and party, with government aid, extended the depth of the main shaft and cross-tunnel, in an effort to find out the extent of the gold reef. As it turned out, the reef was a very large one, and the owners were to do very well out of the Paddy Lackey mine in the years to come.

These owners included Charlie and Jack Cook, Wed and Jack Grabham and Norm Poyitt, with Richard Lean as the chief engineer. They were able to employ up to thirty men at the mine at any one time, during its working life. They followed the reef to a great depth. This gold mine was both the deepest and the richest in the district. The main shaft went down over 650 feet, and was mined to a depth of over 500 feet. The rock extracted was crushed at the mine's own battery (a five head one), and on the site was also a blacksmith shop and a sawmill to supply timber for the underground workings. Later a cyanide plant and a dam were built.

The total output of the Paddy Lackey mine was considerable in the years 1884-1906, but there is some discrepancy between the official figures of the

Department of Mines, and the estimates of the owners. The Department of Mines figures add up to about £50,000 worth of gold, but the real figures could be more like double this amount. If, in fact, gold worth £100,000 was produced, the same amount of gold today would be worth \$15 million (30,000 ounces of gold, then worth £3/10/- an ounce, now worth say \$500 an ounce).

The Cook, Grabham and Poyitt team continued to work the mine up until 1906, when the mine became uneconomic due to the poor quality of quartz being mined. The main reef had averaged two feet wide, but the richest part of the reef was now exhausted.

In 1896 the Paddy Lackey mine was to have been sold, and a deposit had already been paid. The full amount agreed on was £18,000 (today's equivalent of \$3.6 million), but it seems that the buyers to be were unable to raise the full amount.

After 1906, Norm Poyitt took over part of the Paddy Lackey lease, and purchased some of the machinery. He continued to work the mine on a very small scale, crushing quartz and cyaniding the tailings until about 1914, when the mine became idle.

The first cyanide plant had been installed in 1899, but it was not until the years 1934 to 1938 that the tailings from the mine were thoroughly treated by the cyanide process – (used to extract the extremely fine gold residue). Col Wilkinson and his father L.O. Wilkinson treated the old tailings dump and were able to extract about 220 ounces of gold, worth £6 or £7 an ounce. This gave them a reasonable living for their labour of five years.

Recently, Blands from Yetholme have planned an open cut mine at the Paddy Lackey site. There are no historic ruins at that mine as it had been previously planted over with pine trees.

A mine which adjoined the Paddy Lackey was known as the Paddy Lackey Deep Level Extended. This mine was run as a company and managed by Mr. Baucher of the Australian Exploration Co., in 1897. Their plan was to sink a shaft down to 1200 feet, almost twice as deep as the Paddy Lackey shaft, in an attempt to reach the main reef. They reached a depth of about 700 feet, but the reef at that depth proved to be very small, and work was discontinued.

A number of other claims adjoined the Paddy Lackey mine, and some of them were quite successful, for example the Homeward Bound and Dunn's Reef.

#### *Homeward Bound Gold Mine, Dark Corner*

The Homeward Bound Gold Mine is first mentioned in the Department of Mines Annual Report of 1878, when it was held by Curnow and Co. This mine adjoined the Paddy Lackey Mine, being on the same line of reef, and the lease was of five acres. This mine yielded a considerable quantity of gold in its early years. By 1888, the Homeward Bound changed hands and was formed into a company known as the St. George Gold Mining Company. A crushing plant was erected, and twelve men were employed, with the gold output excellent. Mr. Trentham Old held the mine in 1896, and mining was being done on tribute, by Hampton (or Hampden) and party. By 1897, the mine changed ownership and name once more and became known as The Ashton Gold Mining Company. By 1898 the gold yields were poor. Mr. M. Zobel was working the mine on tribute, and was reprocessing some of the left-overs from

earlier mining operations. A *Herald* reporter (27.8.1898) in relating the history of this mine, said: "shafts and adits (tunnels) have been put in all directions. Every manager seems to have had a particular fad of his own without much idea of going far below the surface. The machinery on the ground is in a sorry state and needs considerable overhauling."

Obviously the mine had seen better days. It is never mentioned again in Department of Mines reports, and presumably the mine closed down and was abandoned. In the days when the mine was known as the St. George, a certain amount of quartz crushing was done for other mines, e.g., the Federal Mine on Bob's Creek, who used to cart their quartz out to the St. George battery at Dark Corner, there being only one public battery at Sunny Corner (Murray & Lean's). Quartz was also crushed for the adjoining Dunn's Reef Mine.

#### *Dunn's Reef*

In 1896 great excitement was caused when the brothers George and Martin Dunn discovered gold at Dark Corner. They had been sinking a shaft with aid from the Prospecting Vote, that is, government assistance to gold prospectors. Their lease was a quarter of a mile east of the St. George (Homeward Bound) mine, and about two miles south-east of the Paddy Lackey mine. The reef in 1896 was described as four feet wide at an 80 feet depth. The first crushing of stone was done at the St. George mine's battery, and the shareholders were jubilant at the results. Mr. Shumack (a shareholder) proudly exhibited the first button of gold produced from Dunn's Reef to the *Bathurst Free Press and Mining Journal* newspaper office. The button weighed almost one pound (half a kilogram) – value, about \$7,000 today. In the same year as this reef was discovered, it was sold for cash to a Melbourne firm, with a Mr. Dickens in charge. He called the mine The Great Victoria (the owners having come from Victoria). Plans to erect a ten-head battery did not come to fruition. The gold did not last very long, and the Department of Mines said of this mine in 1933 that "a limited amount of rich ore was won at the surface." Dunn's Reef was held in 1933 by T.A. Hutchinson (Gold Lease 111).

In the same vicinity as the Homeward Bound mine and Dunn's Reef were a number of other smaller claims. Names mentioned are:- McDoual (1875), R. Smith (1881), McAskew (1884), Curnow, Trentham Old, Hampton, M. Zobel, George and Martin Dunn, Dickens, Ossington, Rickard and Odgers, Kissell, Bond, Grant, Magill, Frances, Worrall, Carr, Anderson, Quirk, Ambrose Johnson, James Mounter (the Lady Mary Reef). Other Dark Corner mines and miners mentioned in the records are:- Grey, Badden and Williams (1916), Sure Gift Mine, Ashby, Smith and party (1919) who had a battery, Steven Dunleavy (1889) (Silver Reef Co.).

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## HEALTH AND POLLUTION

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### *"The Dark Cloud that Envelops our Silver Lining"*

In the excitement of watching the streams of molten metal being transformed into row upon row of silver ingots, one important matter had been entirely overlooked by the Sunny Corner Silver Mining Company – that of health and pollution. It was only a short time after the smelters had been started that the first casualties of lead and arsenic poisoning became apparent.



The *Bathurst Times* reported on 1st December, 1884:

Arsenical Poisoning at Mitchell's Creek – The dark cloud enveloping our silver lining, to speak figuratively, is the fact of a number of workmen becoming ill at the silver smelting furnace, through inhaling the fumes therefrom, which are said to be charged with exhalations from the arsenic, lead and silver, contained in the ores treated. A few of the more robust of the men seem able to resist the evil, but the majority succumb, notwithstanding that all kinds of preventatives, in the way of respirators, sponges, woollen comforters, drinking of milk, etc., are employed. The small furnace is 'closed down' for a few days, and a condenser, it is said, is to be attached. Time will no doubt do much towards abating the evil, but I am satisfied that the poisonous principle will never be entirely suppressed, and that the companies will have to pay higher wages and arrange shorter shifts in order to induce men to work at the smelters. The vegetation in the immediate neighbourhood of the Sunny Corner mine is already showing signs of the deleterious effect of the poisonous fumes. I may here say, in respect to the manner in which the men become affected, the nasal organs are usually the first attacked; in some cases it is the stomach and chest; and in others the eyes. Generally speaking, the men work but for a few weeks, and are then compelled to discontinue.

By the middle of the next year, 1885, there were two smelters at work. Some small modifications had been made to help stop the fumes, and the view was put forward by the mine owners that lead fumes prevented epidemics.

*Bathurst Times*, 27th May, 1885:

Sunny Corner – Public Health – I am pleased to say that the health of the town is first class. No cases of sickness whatever are reported, and the medicos of the place complain of the little doing in their particular line of business. This state of affairs seems strange in the face of the reports which were in circulation a short time ago, alleging that the fumes from the smelters were poisonous and very injurious to the workmen. Some are now inclined to think that the immunity from sickness is due to their presence. In conversation with a gentleman of large experience in silver mining, he informed me that lead fumes prevented epidemics; that where there were lead fumes, pulmonary diseases may be contracted, but that they prevented the breaking out of, and in fact killed, epidemics.

At the end of that year there were seven smelters in action at the Sunny Corner mine, two more at the Silver King mine, plus another public smelter. The Nevada company had also started smelting. There were dense volumes of smoke rising up and settling amongst the trees.

The neighbourhood reeked with a peculiar garlic-like odour, and large sores broke out on the bodies of the men who worked the furnaces.

A long article appeared in the *Sydney Mail* on the 16th of January, 1886, regarding the Sunny Corner silver mines. The same article was printed in *The Silver Age* newspaper at Silvertown (Broken Hill area). Curiously, the paragraph regarding pollution was omitted from the Sydney version of the article, but it did appear in *The Silver Age* (20th January, 1886):

Sunny Corner Silver Mine – Looking from the smelting house eastward there is one noticeable piece of work, namely, the flume for carrying away the noxious fumes generated in the furnaces. It runs horizontally for a

distance of about 400 feet towards the hill, after which it rises to the summit, and is capped by two smokestacks. The horizontal portion is 5 ft. 3 inches high and 4 feet in width, and is composed of rivetted iron plates carried on tressles. At a distance of about every 2 feet along the bottom there are large funnels opening into sacks, and by this means the lead-fume dust which condenses is removed. There is, however, a serious escape from the furnaces when the charges are being thrown into them, and the whole neighbourhood reeks with that peculiar garlic-like odour which proclaims the presence of arsenical fumes. The work of continually cleaning out the flume, and no doubt the fact of breathing air contaminated with lead and arsenic, is followed with most distressing results in some of the men occupied around the furnaces. Large sores break out on their bodies, and they become incapacitated for work until they seek a purer atmosphere. By the orders of Mr. Nicholas, however, a number of hot and cold baths have been erected, and if the men take advantage of these they will no doubt escape as much of the evil as is caused by outward contamination. They will not, however, prevent the inhaling of noxious fumes. Mr. Gafford took charge of the smelting at the beginning of the new year, and he believes he will be able to check the escape of fumes by the introduction of a steam spray into the furnace, by which the volatilised minerals will be condensed.

The fumes from the smelters at the Silver King mine were not as troublesome as those from the Sunny Corner silver mine's smelters, the Silver King smelters had been designed by Mr. Gafford. But it was estimated that two tons of pure arsenic a day was emitted from the seven smelters of the Sunny Corner mine. The Department of Mines Annual Report, issued at the end of 1885, quoted an article from *The Tribune* newspaper:

The new smelters of the Silver King Company are, however, a vast improvement to those of the Sunny Corner Company, in respect to the discharge of fumes. These are diminished very effectually by the application of live steam in the funnel. This deadens the fumes and drives a great deal of the lead and arsenic contained in them back into the furnace. The value of this invention is immeasurable. The Sunny Corner Company, in a praiseworthy effort to carry the fumes off a great distance, and to extract the bullion in their transit, expended about £3,000 in the construction of nearly half a mile of immense fluming; yet the anticipated success has not been attained. Either the fluming – big as it is – or the chimney at the terminus, is of insufficient capacity to carry away these poisonous fumes. That they are deadly poisonous I have abundant evidence. Much of the ore contains 2 per cent of arsenic, and 100 tons of ore smelted a day means the distribution of two tons of pure arsenic. Arsenical fumes are bad, but lead poisoning is infinitely worse. In smelting, large quantities of lead are used, much of which goes away in fumes, killing all the vegetation in the vicinity of their distribution, and, I have reason to believe, seriously affecting the health of those brought into close contact with the poisonous matter. The Public Smelter is the worst in this respect, and the sight of a man feeding the furnace with his mouth covered made me suspect that it was only a matter of time when such work would kill the strongest man alive, and that it was also only a matter of time when these furnaces would, in the interests of public health, have to receive the attention of the Government.

A newspaper article of 15th January, 1886 (paper unknown) stated: It is painful to see the furnace men at the Sunny Corner Mine working away with a handkerchief tied over their faces, and to hear them complain of the effects of what is really slow poisoning. Such an evil should not be allowed to continue any longer; and if the directors do not cope with it then the Mining Department should step in and do its duty.

The silver mines around Broken Hill started smelting during 1885 and their smelters were being installed by the same people who had built the Sunny Corner smelters. There was a great deal of interest being shown at Broken Hill and Silverton in the silver mines of Sunny Corner, which had been the first in Australia to successfully smelt silver. Articles about Sunny Corner were regularly appearing in Silverton's *Silver Age*, with reprints from Sunny Corner's own *Silver Press* newspaper being quoted. While the issue of health was regarded as important, the slow and insidious effects of lead poisoning were not fully appreciated at either Broken Hill or Sunny Corner for many years to come.

Quotes from Silverton's *Silver Age* newspaper:

12th May, 1886 – *Silver Press* – At Sunny Corner mine the fumes are again very troublesome and many of the workmen are complaining of sickness.  
26th May, 1886 – The fumes from the Sunny Corner smelters (says the local *Press*) are becoming unbearable, and we should not be surprised to hear that the company will have to shut down some of their furnaces on this account as many of the men are complaining very seriously.

15th September, 1886 – *Silver Press* – The flume that was built at the cost of some thousands of pounds for the purpose of carrying away the obnoxious fumes, had insufficient capacity. [free quote]

When the town of Broken Hill was becoming established, in the shadow of the silver smelters, the idea was put forward there that perhaps the town should have been built further away from the smelters. Consider Sunny Corner, it was said, at that place the fumes are very bad and people are becoming ill. But the Broken Hill Progress Committee considered the climate of their town to be vastly different to that of Sunny Corner. Broken Hill had clear air and strong breezes "so we are not much afraid of fumes resting on or about our fast-rising town." Sunny Corner on the other hand, they said, had cold winters and fog which trapped the fumes. The town of Broken Hill did not move, but the people there were poisoned by lead fumes none-the-less.

Broken Hill eventually had many more smelters belching forth poisonous smoke, and it is interesting to read of the effects that lead poisoning had on Broken Hill. In his book *The Rise of Broken Hill*, Geoffrey Blainey writes about the effects of lead poisoning on the miners at Broken Hill, and this could equally apply to the miners at Sunny Corner.

The early signs of lead-poisoning were paleness of face, lassitude, loss of appetite, and indigestion: symptoms which in booming Broken Hill could easily be mistaken for heat exhaustion or a hangover. In the first stage of lead-poisoning, men also complained of a persistent metallic taste in the mouth. If they felt too weak to work and decided to leave Broken Hill permanently or take a long holiday, they eventually recovered their health. Most men in the early days were, fortunately, bachelors and wanderers, and their greater mobility reduced the toll of the disease. The men who remained

at Broken Hill and continued to inhale or swallow the fine oxidized lead became weaker and eventually could not do hard physical work. The weakness was felt first in the wrists and hands, then spread to the shoulders and legs; limp wrists were surprisingly common in a population which had two or three times the normal quota of strong young men. The poison could also affect the nervous system, leading to the spasms known locally as 'lead fits'. Long after the disease was mastered at Broken Hill, mimics would evoke merriment by imitating a man in the grip of a 'lead fit'.

By 1891-2 in Broken Hill, it was noted that lead dust was carried by the wind and deposited on grass and bare ground where animals grazed. Milking cows within several miles of the Broken Hill smelters had died or lost condition. Most caged parrots had fits and died, although white cockatoos survived. Kittens and pups died, although more mature dogs and cats introduced from the coast survived. There was also a high rate of infant mortality.

It was not until 1895 that the N.S.W. Government passed a Lead Poisoning Act – too late for the mines at Sunny Corner! The first statistics on lead poisoning were collected from Broken Hill in 1895, when many were found to be suffering from lead poisoning, either mildly or severely. By 1898 Broken Hill had transferred their smelting activities to Port Pirie – the incidence of lead poisoning in Broken Hill fell dramatically, but increased at Port Pirie.

There must have been considerable suffering at Sunny Corner too. The fumes from the smelters and the open roasting pits killed all the vegetation on the hill next to the mine and the men at the mine were becoming ill. The effects on the town are not really known, but the townsfolk must have been affected. There was enough fallout over the town to affect the iron roofs of the houses. Sulphur in the air reacted with the galvanised coating on the corrugated iron – an acid effect which would leave holes in the roof. So all the town roofs had to be painted with red oxide paint, and Sunny Corner was known as the town with the red roofs. If there was sulphur in the air, there must have been plenty of lead and arsenic too. People had rainwater catchment tanks, although many had wells also. Water was not laid on to the township from the reservoir until 1891. Up to that time, the school had been entirely dependent upon rainwater catchment. The teacher in 1891 made a special request for the reservoir pipes to be extended to the school, as he believed that the school's tank water was contaminated from the smelters.

How widespread was lead and arsenic poisoning in Sunny Corner? It is just not possible to make an accurate statement on this matter. In those times, there were always unexplained illnesses, and not only at Sunny Corner. Sometimes an unexplained death could be officially listed as a Visitation by God, and no further inquiry was necessary. The people of Sunny Corner suffered from epidemics of typhoid, food poisoning, gastro-enteritis and influenza, and innumerable other complaints, as did people everywhere. The symptoms of lead and arsenic poisoning could easily have merged with the symptoms of other diseases, and escaped recognition. There was no worker's compensation for the mine workers, and one wonders if the Sunny Corner Silver Mining Company would have made such a big profit if it had taken into account the unprofitable side effects that its smelters had on the workers and townsfolk.

Lead poisoning is the kind that builds up gradually in the body. Lead can be dissolved in the body fluids and stored in the body indefinitely. Symptoms

of lead poisoning include headache, irritability, loss of red blood cells, a feeling of sluggishness, and in severe cases, brain damage, blindness, kidney damage, convulsions and death.

Miners were made aware of the preventatives they should use – leaflets were circulated to miners in Broken Hill in 1886 and no doubt the Sunny Corner miners were aware of these cures and preventatives for lead poisoning. These were: always washing hands before meals, wearing a respirator made of flannel or gauze to cover the nose and mouth – to be worn while at work so as to prevent small particles of lead from being inhaled. The men should take off their working clothes on leaving the mine, take a warm bath, and be particular in washing their hands and cleaning their nails; also in cleansing their lips and teeth, and clearing the nose and throat from mucous accumulations. The eating of fatty foods was supposed to help counteract the effects of lead; foods such as bacon and butter, and lots of fresh milk. A type of lemonade was also recommended, it was made with sulphuric acid and was supposed to help dissolve the lead. Lead could be taken into the body through the skin, through breathing its fumes, and by mouth when food was eaten without the hands being washed, also lead dust could be swallowed. The cures were – Epsom salts plus sulphuric acid to carry the lead out of the system (the cure for lead colic), and the taking of hot baths in which was dissolved sulphuret of potassium, to neutralize any lead in the skin. An old Broken Hill miner recently recounted how his mother had mixed up a bottle of castor oil and lemons – he swallowed “a little pannikin full every day, and that’s what helped keep the lead out of me. All me other mates got the lead poisoning and died.”

As well as the lead dust and fumes, there was silica dust in the mines underground and this could cause silicosis, a chronic lung disease which could lead to death. There were also rockfalls to contend with, and the water underfoot in the mine tunnels was so acid that it ate into the leather soles of the men’s boots.

As for the arsenic, which lingered with a garlic odour, its effects on Sunny Corner are not well documented. In 1890, The Sunny Corner Silver Mining Company built a new flue and chimney, from bricks, to replace the earlier iron flue of 1885-6. This was in an effort to solve the problem of fumes, and the mine directors in their annual report for 1890 stated: “The main flue is nearly completed, so that the health of the Company’s employees will not be prejudicially affected by arsenical fumes, as hitherto”. This statement indicates that there had definitely been a problem with arsenic poisoning at the mine.

The symptoms of severe arsenic poisoning were indistinguishable from those of gastro-enteritis, which was common enough anyway in those days. A certain immunity to arsenic could be developed through repeated small doses of it, and this may have been what happened at Sunny Corner. There was not quite enough of it in the air to kill off the town’s population outright, so the people had time to develop some immunity to it. In Austria, peasants had for generations actually taken small doses of arsenic in the belief that it was good for their health. They claimed that it rounded out their figures, beautified their complexions, and improved their wind for climbing the local hills. In England and Europe, arsenic was used in the treatment of malaria, and sometimes as an aphrodisiac for men. Women bathed it on their faces and it was used in skin lotions and cosmetics, as well as for treating scab in sheep.

A famous Agatha Christie book dealt with the subject of arsenic – a murder had been committed and arsenic was the poison used. The poisoner, and the poison, had escaped detection because the arsenic had been added to an omelette which was shared by two men. One man had made himself immune to arsenic by having taken repeated small daily doses of it for several months beforehand. The murdered man had no such immunity and had died of the effects of the arsenic almost immediately.

Traces of arsenic can still be found in the soil around the Sunny Corner mine, and the creek which runs through the mine is contaminated with the heavy metals zinc, lead, copper and cadmium, plus sulphuric acid. The hillside next to the mine is badly eroded due to the vegetation having been killed by mine fumes, mostly during the period 1884 to 1891. In the 1950s, the hillside was still quite bare and scoured, but since then native tussock grasses have begun to spread, and self-sown pine trees are becoming well established.

Just over the hill to the east of the mine is a green paddock of 40 acres. For many years pasture could not be established here as the soil was extremely acid; it took many tons of lime to correct the problem. The fence line at the top of this paddock is still affected by sulphur in the soil, which causes the iron fence posts, wire and netting to rust prematurely. There have been no lingering effects of pollution from the mine noted in the town.

Before finishing this chapter on health and pollution, mention should be made of two other poisonous substances widely used at Sunny Corner in connection with gold mining – mercury and cyanide.

Mercury was used in the amalgamation process in treating gold. Probably most cases of mercury poisoning would have been caused by breathing in the vapours during the various gold recovery processes. Col Wilkinson remembers that some men who handled mercury became “salivated”, although he did not understand what the term meant. Also, the affected man could turn a silver threepence black just by rubbing it in the palm of his hand. A book on poisons states that early symptoms of mercury poisoning are excess salivation, numbness, crankiness, forgetfulness, sore mouth and throat. More serious symptoms were severe intestinal disturbance, kidney damage, brain damage, and eventually death. The onset of symptoms in mercury poisoning is very slow.

The effects of cyanide, unlike those of lead and mercury, were instant. Cyanide was widely used after 1900, in a chemical process for gold recovery. It was especially useful to extract extremely fine gold, such as that found in the tailings heap from a stamper battery. To the naked eye, these tailings would appear to contain no gold, but when treated with the cyanide process, the “invisible” specks of gold would be dissolved in the cyanide solution and could subsequently be recovered. This process could also be used for silver recovery. In the 1930s Col Wilkinson and his father used the cyanide process to treat the slime dam (tailings dam) at an old gold mine at Dark Corner (the Paddy Lackey mine). The treatment was successful and they made a fair profit. Col relates a few stories about the use of cyanide. In general the cyanide process was considered safe. It was widely used in Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland in gold recovery. If the right precautions were taken, all was well. But occasionally accidents happened. The effect of cyanide as a poison is instant. A large enough dose would cause instant death. A small dose however could be survived. Col says that his father once accidentally splashed



some cyanide solution and a drop of it hit his tongue. Instantly, he became giddy and "staggered around for a bit" as Col recalls, and then recovered. If the dose was not sufficient to kill, the victim would recover quickly enough and no antidote was apparently needed. Col also claims that the cyanide solution, (which was stored in open vats, and looked like ordinary water), was not a danger to dogs or horses, which refused to drink it, but that cows had a particular liking for it and would break down a fence to get at it. Two cows died at Dark Corner after drinking cyanide-laced water which had spilled from a vat, and Col and his father were obliged to compensate the owner.

Another hazard was in mixing the solution. The cyanide was in a solid form and had to be dissolved in water. Usually it was mixed in the water with bare hands, although rubber gloves were recommended by some people. The cyanide was not absorbed through the skin, but occasionally some people would develop an allergy to the substance and break out in a rash on their hands and arms. Those men who smoked roll-your-own cigarettes also had to be sure to wash their hands before rolling their cigarette, if they happened to be handling cyanide. A man of Col's acquaintance received a dose of cyanide after licking the cigarette paper (he forgot to wash his hands), but fortunately he suffered only from a giddy attack and lived to tell the tale.

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## PART II – THE TOWN

### IN THE EARLY DAYS OF MITCHELL'S CREEK

Mitchell's Creek was settled long before Sunny Corner ever was. During the 1850s, miners following the gold rushes passed through this district, and tried their luck panning for gold in Mitchell's Creek. They were most successful. The gold had been washed down from the reefs of Big Hill and Little Hill, and these reefs were mined in later years. Other creeks in the area were also gold bearing, Bob's Creek, Lagoon Creek, Daylight Creek and Cockatoo Gully (now Scott's Creek). Mitchell's Creek was named after the State's Surveyor-General, Sir Thomas Mitchell, and the area became the centre of a new gold-mining settlement.

This settlement at Mitchell's Creek was two kilometres west of the present township of Sunny Corner. Sunny Corner then was just all bushland, and didn't become a town until 1884.

Richard Lean, who settled at Mitchell's Creek in 1875, estimated that in its heyday, Mitchell's Creek would have given sanctuary to perhaps 2,000 people, the miners wearing red shirts and cabbage-tree hats (straw hats). It is hard to imagine such a scene of bustling activity today, as nearly all of the area where the miners would have worked is now a silent pine forest plantation.

The scene would probably have been typical of those in other gold rush areas, with the miners and their families living in tents or makeshift dwellings, and hastily built shops catering to their needs.

The settlement took on a more permanent look when about a dozen stamper batteries were installed along the creeks. There were also said to be three waterwheels. Richard Lean recounted how small boys of the neighbourhood would enjoy riding inside the disused waterwheels.

Individuals began to band together to form syndicates. One battery was operated at Cockatoo Point (at the junction of Mitchell's Creek and Cockatoo Gully). It was run by a group of free settlers, hence the name "Cockatoo".

Those miners who stayed on at Mitchell's Creek into the 1860s built cottages and cultivated vegetable plots, and a small township became established.

A post office opened in 1862, a police station before 1863, and a school in 1864. The church there was probably built in the early 1860s, and there were also two hotels and several stores at that time. By the mid 1860s the population had dropped dramatically from Mr. Lean's 1850s estimate of 2,000 people. By 1866 the population was officially 300, and by 1875, when the Lean family arrived, the population was only 150. As the gold became more difficult to obtain, the miners had moved on.

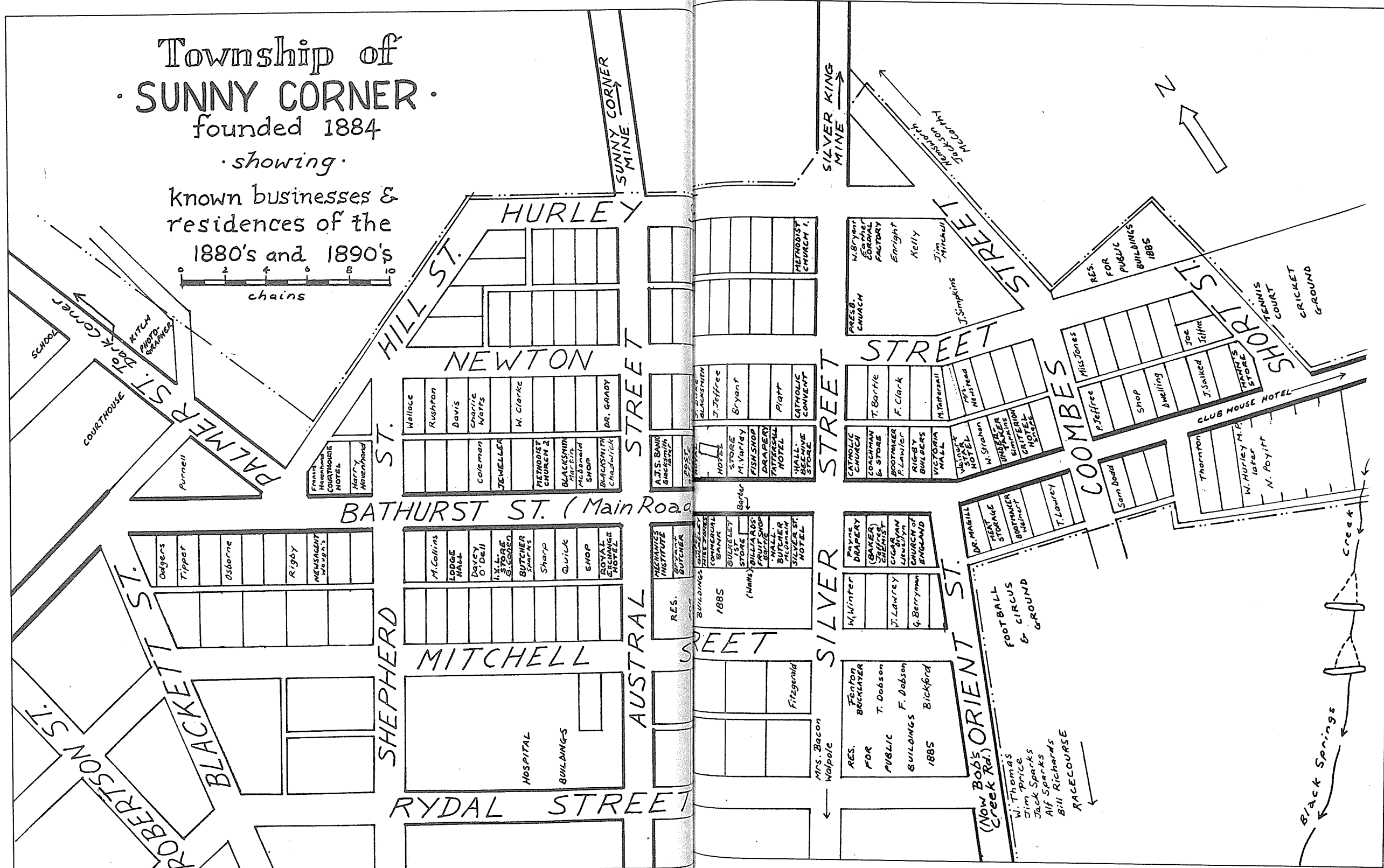
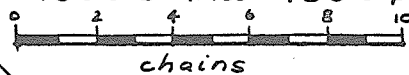
In 1866 there were still five quartz crushing machines at work. A horse-drawn coach ran twice weekly between Mitchell's Creek and Frying Pan (now Yetholme), which was eight miles away. The route to Sydney in those days was by coach to Yetholme, then to Meadow Flat and on down the mountains to Penrith railway station, where one could then catch a train to Sydney. (The railway line reached Wentworth Falls in 1867, Rydal in 1870 and Bathurst in 1876.) There was no direct road then from Mitchell's Creek to Meadow Flat as there is now. This road was not begun until about 1883-4.

The only map of Mitchell's Creek that I have yet found is dated 1885. It

founded 1884

· showing ·

known businesses &  
residences of the  
1880's and 1890's



shows many abandoned mine workings and also many residential blocks. On the map are marked cottages, humpies, huts, yards, cultivated plots, stables, as well as mining leases. Also marked are two stores, a church, a school and a hotel.

Today there are just two homes at Mitchell's Creek, or West Mitchell as it is now known. One of these is the old school residence, built about 1878, and the other is a newer home incorporating a small general store.

### SETTLEMENT AT SUNNY CORNER

#### *"The Lively Little Township on the Ridge"*

Thus was the town of Sunny Corner described in December 1884, just five months after its foundation, by a visiting *Sydney Morning Herald* journalist. The town of Sunny Corner had come into existence rather suddenly. After several years of mining for gold in the area, large deposits of silver were discovered. The Sunny Corner Silver Mining Company was then formed in 1884, and at the same time a township was laid out to accommodate the sudden influx of miners and their families. This town was just two kilometres east of Mitchell's Creek.

At first the miners lived in tents, then they built rough cottages to accommodate their families, and a little later, when two local building

Mitchell's Creek (West Mitchell), 1884. Photo courtesy Mitchell Library, Sydney

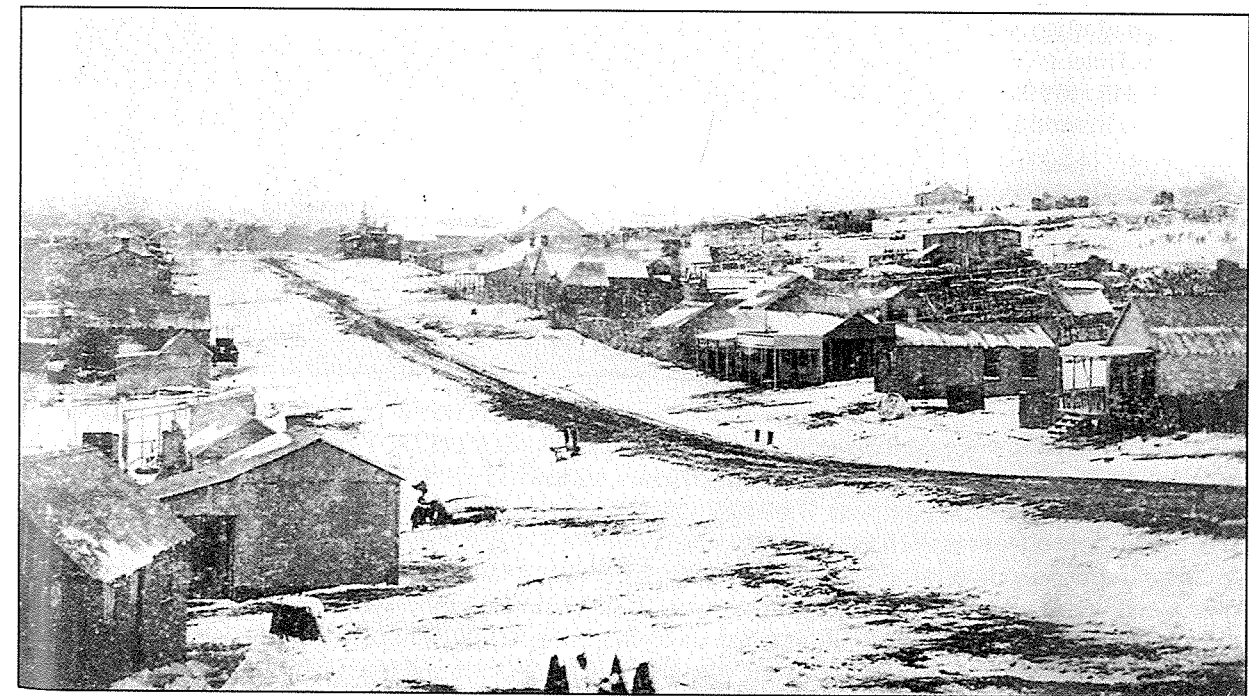


companies were established, neater homes of weatherboard and corrugated iron were built, many to a standard design of four rooms with an outdoor kitchen. There were once hundreds of such homes at Sunny Corner. Many shops lined the main street, eight or nine hotels were built, and four churches called the faithful to worship at least twice every Sunday. Speculators in silver shares grew rich. The miners had regular employment, until they fell victim to an accident or lead poisoning! There was no workers' compensation then either.

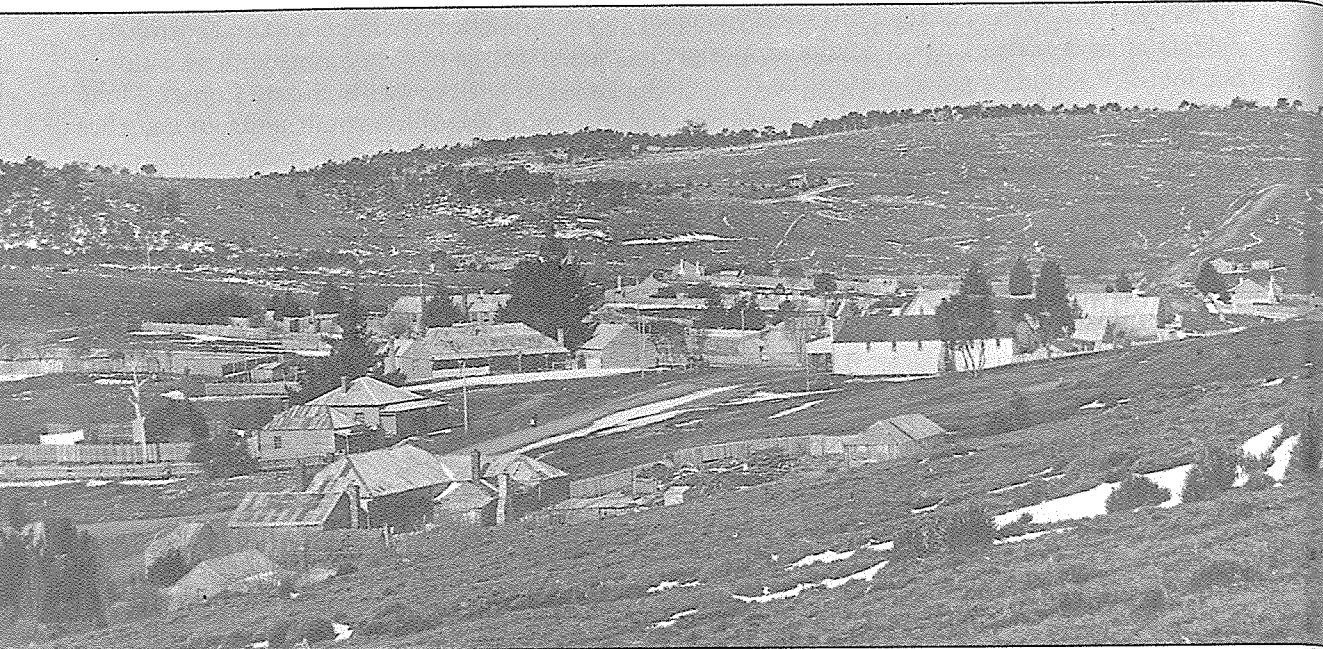


At right: The town, seen from a similar angle to that in the photo below, December 1955. Photo courtesy Frank Storey, Woy Woy

Below: Snow scene, Sunny Corner township (looking east), late 1880s. Photo courtesy Bruce McPhail, Lithgow







Above: Township of Sunny Corner, 1921 – Empire Brand postcard. Some of the buildings are (left to right): Royal Exchange Hotel (foreground), small store, post office, Royal Hotel, Varley's Store, Bulkeley's Store. The Church of England is behind Bulkeley's Store, and the convent can be seen behind the Royal Hotel. Photo courtesy Marsden family, Portland

At right: Side view of Bulkeley's Store (enlargement of photo above). Note Church of England behind store.



As well as the numerous stores, there was a post office, schools with a combined total of 400 to 500 pupils, two banks, a police station and court house, many boarding houses, and two large tents which served as a hospital. A complete list of all the known shops and other establishments is given elsewhere.

Mac Scott, a local gold miner of the 1880s, once described how the miners from outlying areas would all come into the town of Sunny Corner on a Saturday night to do their shopping. All the shops would be open, and the pubs no doubt did a brisk trade also. Often the town band would play, and



Town panorama, late 1880s, as viewed from near the police station. Havenhand's Court House Hotel can be seen as the large building left of centre. Photo courtesy Bruce McPhail, Lithgow

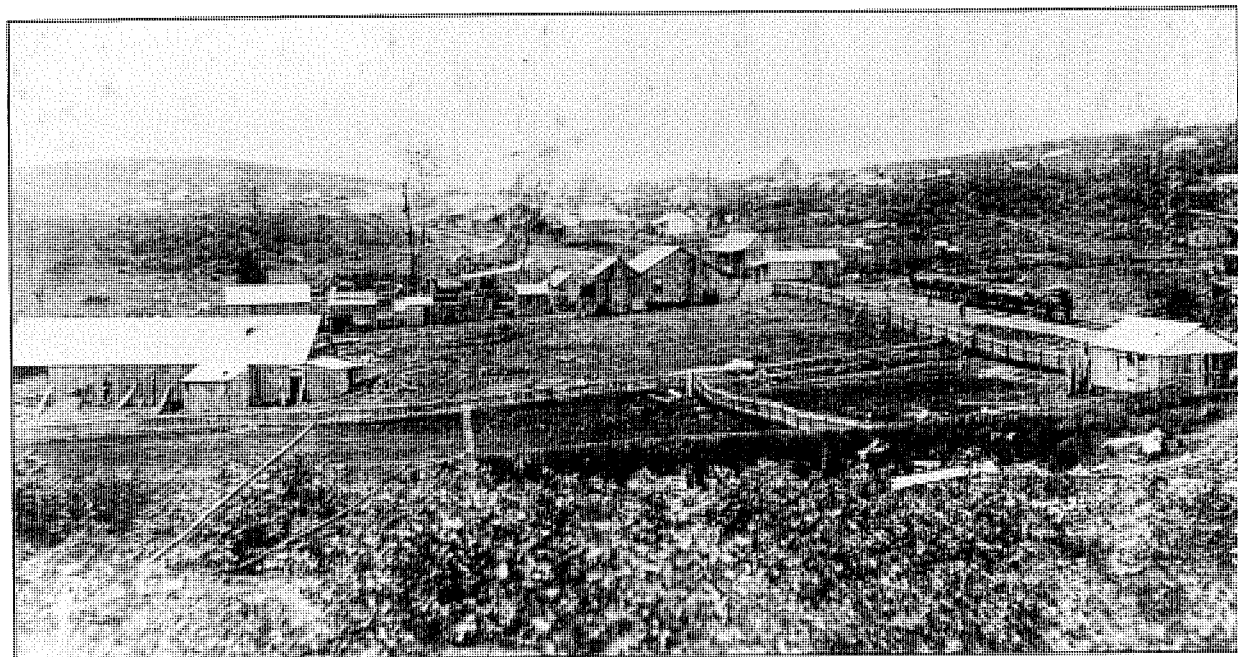
there might be wrestling and boxing matches too. The crowds in the town, he said, were shoulder to shoulder, a scene most difficult to imagine today! The population then was around 4,000.

Nearly all the early shops and houses have gone now. Instead of becoming a ghost town, Sunny Corner just seemed to quietly evaporate. By the 1940s virtually the entire township had been removed, piece by piece, elsewhere.

There are some wonderful descriptions of the emerging township of Sunny Corner in a number of newspaper reports of the time. Some of these are now quoted and should give the reader a good picture of the early town.

11th October, 1884, *Town and Country Journal* :

The first indications of the infant township of Sunny Corner are the corner pegs and trenches cut by the miners to reserve town allotments at intervals of 66 feet, fronting what will be the main road. After having passed a number of these, a tent or two appears. Here, workmen are seen busily engaged putting up the frameworks of small dwellings and stores. In what will probably be the centre of the town, two hotels are near completion, and at various points around are a few rough stores, comprising a bakery, two butchers', and two produce stores. Large sawmills are shortly to be erected in the vicinity of the town, and tenders will ere long be called for the erection of a post and telegraph office and police station. In consequence of the clause of the Mining Act requiring improvements to the value of £10 to be made on the various selections before the expiration of 28 days, the whole scene is one of bustling activity; the miners, after finishing their daily toil, devoting all their spare energies to the erection of various styles of dwelling-houses, from the humble and primitive bark shanty to the more pretentious modern galvanized iron hut. The great majority of the inhabitants are still, so to speak, camping out, and clearing is being actively carried on around the new township, which is, if we may believe rumour, to be called Mitchell, and commences one mile east of Mitchell's Creek.



View looking west towards Sunny Corner, late 1880s. This photograph was taken from near the recreation ground. Large building on the left may be a sawmill. Photo courtesy Bruce McPhail, Lithgow

The town was indeed named Mitchell for a short while, but local agitation caused the reintroduction of the name Sunny Corner. A government surveyor had been kept busy laying out the new town during a rather wintery August in 1884, when snow was lying on the ground. Mitchell was proclaimed a township on 7th October, 1884.

*Bathurst Times*, 26th September, 1884:

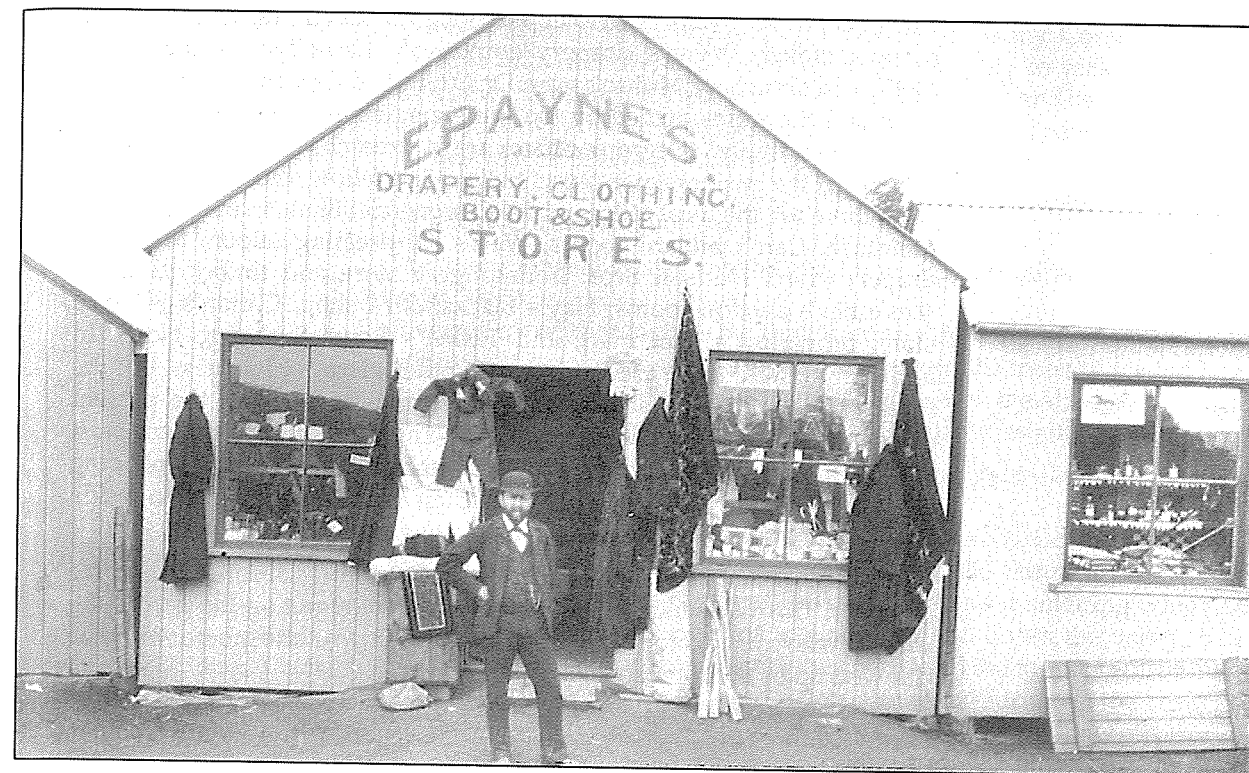
Lots in the township are fetching from £10 to £35 per lot. These are only held in most cases by a miner's right.

A sale of town allotments was held by the government in October 1887. Many town residents had never bothered to purchase their blocks before building on them. They had cleared and fenced these blocks before building their cottages, but the tenure of the land was dubious. The government planned to sell the allotments nevertheless, and the miners were to be given twenty-eight days to remove their residences, should the lots be sold. Those who had the means though, were able to purchase land when the town was first begun. One of these was Mr. Varley, who built the first hotel in Sunny Corner.

June 1885, newspaper cutting:

Mr. Varley was one of the earliest arrivals at Sunny Corner, and was the first man to take up land and build upon it. Mr. Varley said that when he first arrived, just a few short months ago, not a hut was to be seen anywhere. All was wild bush. The rush had not yet occurred. With enterprise, which was much ridiculed at the time, he began to build his present substantial and well-appointed hotel, which was looked upon as perfectly wild speculation...

John Varley's Royal Hotel opened on 15th October, 1884. But within a matter of weeks, Thomas Tasker's Royal Exchange Hotel had opened just across the road, and Ludwig Weinert's Star Hotel had also opened, not far down the road.



E. Payne's Drapery Store, c.1886. Photo by Beavis Bros. & Co., Bathurst, courtesy Bathurst District Historical Society

There was plenty of competition with the hotels; Mr. Snape's Criterion Hotel was opened in mid-1885, just two doors down from Weinert's. And by the following year or so, there would be another four hotels, making a total of eight.

When Mr. Varley's hotel opened, there were whole rows of wooden buildings along the main thoroughfare. Law and order were lacking, and it was reported that there were many fights, with rowdy hooligans roaming about at night. A police station and court house helped to control this situation, and were hastily constructed.

June 1885, newspaper cutting:

The town sprang into existence as if by magic. Its progress has been accelerating, and it is likely to become one of the most prosperous and wealthy towns in the Colony of N.S.W.

Such were the hopes of the newcomers to Sunny Corner.

The same article also described the shops seen by the journalist as he travelled into the township by a horse-drawn coach. The road up from Meadow Flat was appalling.

Having waded through the elongated quagmire intervening between Meadow Flat and the borders of the township, the visitor enters the main street, and is surprised to find himself surrounded with stores, shops, hotels, public buildings, and hundreds of private dwellings. The following list of some of the leading business establishments, the names of which I noted down as I passed up the main street in the coach, will afford some idea of the proportions of the place:- a large steam sawmill in full swing, and owned by Mr. John Hurley, a herbalist's shop, a dispensing chemist, Snape's Hotel, Rigby Bros. (carpenters and builders), G. Kell's plumbing



and tank works, Weinert's Hotel and Victoria Assembly, a saddler and harness maker, Payne's drapery emporium, Llewellyn's cigar divan, McDonald's butchery, Munro's store, Dr. O'Grady's dispensary, Mr. Varley's hotel and the stores owned by the same gentleman, Bulkeley's store, in which the post and telegraph offices are at present located, but which a number of the business men object to have in a fellow tradesman's store... Then there are the local offices of the Commercial Bank, managed by Mr. McIntosh, Carr's billiard rooms, Watt's hairdressing saloon, Manson's drapery store, Hudson Bros. ironmongery store and timber yard, Le Messurier's auction rooms, Hay's blacksmith's shop, Clifton's produce store, Brownlow's fruit mart, and Tasker's Royal Exchange Hotel. In addition to these there are a number of other places of business, but the foregoing incomplete list will serve to form some idea of the present dimensions and appearance of the place... The population at present must be close upon 3,000, and when many of the miners who are at present living alone in temporary huts or tents bring their wives and children to reside with them, the population will probably exceed 5,000 souls.

People even believed for a while that Sunny Corner was destined to become a large city. The following article shows a touch of regret on the part of the journalist, who considered that the friendly small town atmosphere would be swallowed up by an impersonal city.

*Bathurst Free Press and Mining Journal, 29th August, 1885:*

Sunny Corner, or Mitchell, is delightfully situated in a hollow – large, heavily timbered hills rising from the main street. The place is dotted with hundreds of little huts, cottages and tents, mixed up among the trees and brushwood. The main street, Bathurst Street, is pretty well lined with houses, mostly business houses and hotels, while as far as the eye can reach can be seen little wreaths of smoke, clearly proving that someone had

Rigby Brothers, Timber Merchants, c1886. Photo by Beavis & Co., Bathurst, courtesy Bathurst District Historical Society



'pitched' there... With regard to the people at Sunny Corner, they are sociable and friendly, and think nothing a trouble to make a stranger welcome... Ere long the trees and bushes that so adorn and beautify the hills will be cut away, the streets, with numberless houses and people, substituted in their places. The daily routine of busy city life will take the place of the quiet and pleasant harmony which now prevails, and then the charm, to me, of Sunny Corner will be gone.

The same journalist also visited the Sunny Corner silver mine – (29th August, 1885):

It seems a peculiar sight – far down among the hills – to see the dense volumes of smoke rising up and settling among the trees; to see the large furnaces emitting their molten stream of melted metal; and to see the hundreds of men working at the different furnaces, engines, pumps, etc.

A similar sentiment of regret is expressed by another journalist in a newspaper cutting, March, 1885:

As one looks along down Daylight Creek valley, and discovers the smoke stacks, flumes, furnaces, trams, and sheds of the Sunny Corner Silver Mining Company, and observes the preparations for smelting which are being made at the other claims scattered up and down the valley, he is forced to the reflection that, though the district and the country will be made richer by the operations of these hideous smelting furnaces, the beauty of the surrounding landscape will be deteriorated. Where all is now picturesque and romantic, soon will come the blackness and the noise, the smoke, and the soot, the concomitants of man's enterprise and efforts to make himself master of the internal riches of nature, which he prizes more than all her

R.H. Bulkeley and Co., Commercial Stores, 1886. Building at left is also R.H. Bulkeley's Furniture, Bedsteads and Bedding, China and Glass. A new store was later built between these two buildings. Photo by Beavis Bros. & Co., Bathurst, courtesy Bathurst District Historical Society







R.H. Bulkeley's new store, late 1880s. Photo courtesy Bruce McPhail, Lithgow

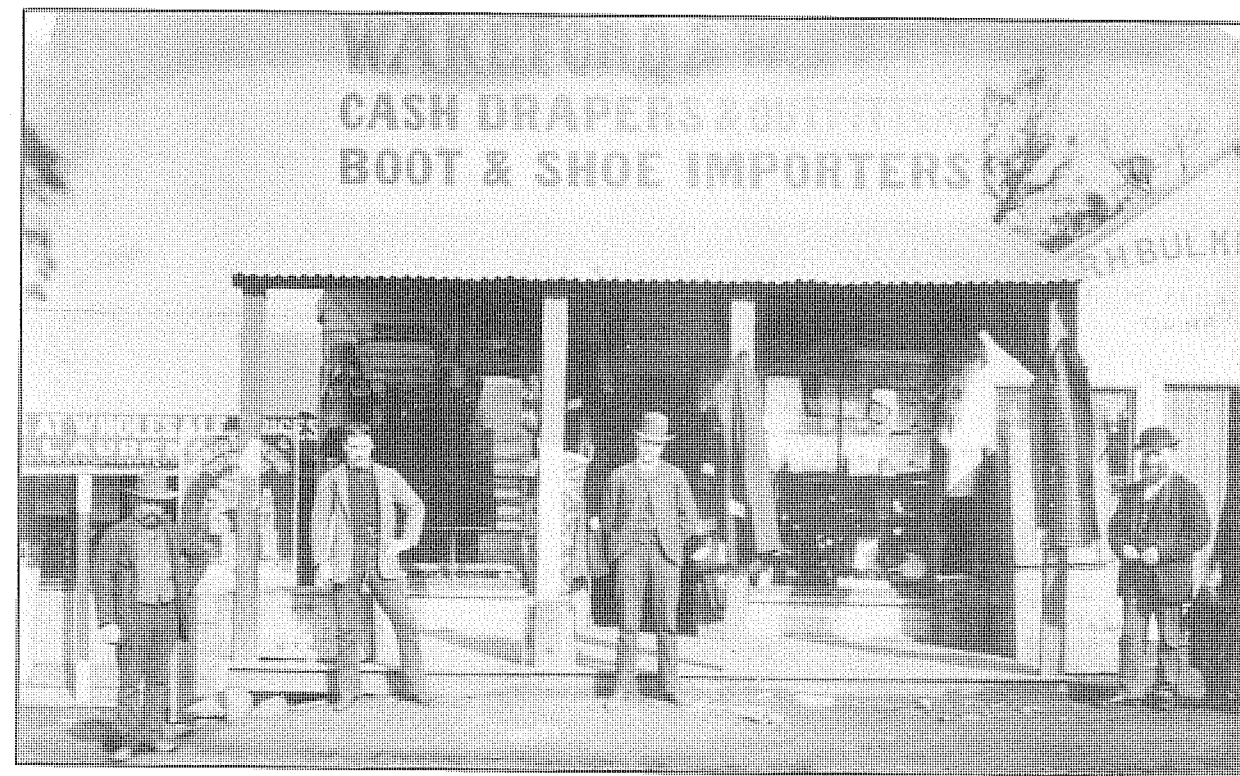
external beauties. Already numerous new furnaces for smelting the precious ore are in the course of erection at the various other claims. In a few years the place will assume all the traditional features of a rich and prosperous mining district, while on the site of the little hamlet of Mitchell will probably have sprung up one of those flourishing towns which mineral wealth is known to call so rapidly into existence.

The year of 1885 was one of optimism and growth for Sunny Corner. The next article gives an impression of a lively mining town.

*Bathurst Free Press and Mining Journal*, 10th October, 1885:

Those who visited Sunny Corner in the olden days, when mining for gold was the only work carried on, one would scarcely believe their eyes if they visited the place now. In place of a dozen or two rude huts occupied by the fossickers and a few score of men busy in the creek or on the hillside, they would see scores of substantial wooden and iron buildings and crowds of busy bustling men, women and children, dense clouds of smoke issuing from lofty chimney stacks, elaborate smelting works, lengthy tunnels with tram lines, deep shafts, and fairly formed roads intersecting the mountains at every turn, the scene forming one of the liveliest pictures of active mining life that one could wish to see.

But just eleven days later, on 21st October, 1885, trouble began. An "expert mining consultant" arrived from Victoria and criticised the Sunny Corner mine manager for his wasteful methods of mining. Rumours spread, the mine manager resigned, and shares in the silver mine dropped sharply. The Nevada mine was also in trouble at this time. Although the Sunny Corner mine was to continue successful operations until the end of 1891, this hiccup in October 1885 caused rumblings of unease in the town, and people began to leave.



Wakeford and Wylie, Cash Drapers and Outfitters, 1886. At left is L.L. Laurence, at right, R.H. Bulkeley. Photo by Beavis Bros. & Co., Bathurst, courtesy Bathurst District Historical Society

A correspondent of the *Sydney Mail* had this to say on 16th January, 1886: The main portion of the township sprang up like a gourd in the night time, and basked in the sunshine of dividends for shareholders and plenty of remunerative work for the bread winners. But hard times came, and the settlement appeared as if it would die out under the pressure of adversity. The Sunny Corner Mine gradually became less prosperous, and £7/10/- shares fell by 70%. The Nevada's fared still worse, coming down from 37/6 to 18 pence, and a large mine known as the Bulldog stopped work. The population is said to have reached 4,500 in flush times, whereas now it is estimated at anything from 1,500 to 3,000. Despite the general dullness however, a new township has been laid out in the neighbourhood of the Silver Queen ground.

#### *The Second Township – "streets destitute of inhabitants"*

Had the silver mines gone ahead as successfully as was hoped, a second township could well have been established, in addition to the first. In a burst of optimism, but with unfortunate mistiming, the Silver Queen company had one of their 40 acre freehold blocks surveyed for a second township, during September, 1885. The block was first cleared of timber, the roots were grubbed out, and the wood was cut and stacked into lengths suitable for use as firewood for the mines. The sale of the firewood was to cover the cost of the clearing – it took forty men four weeks to finish the job.

The town was then surveyed and pegged out into 33-foot allotments by Surveyor Stephen. Streets were carefully marked out, and a reservation was even made for a church.



The crowd outside Bulkeley's Store, awaiting the arrival of riders in a bicycle race, 15th August 1908. Photo by George C. Fraser, courtesy Martin family, Dark Corner

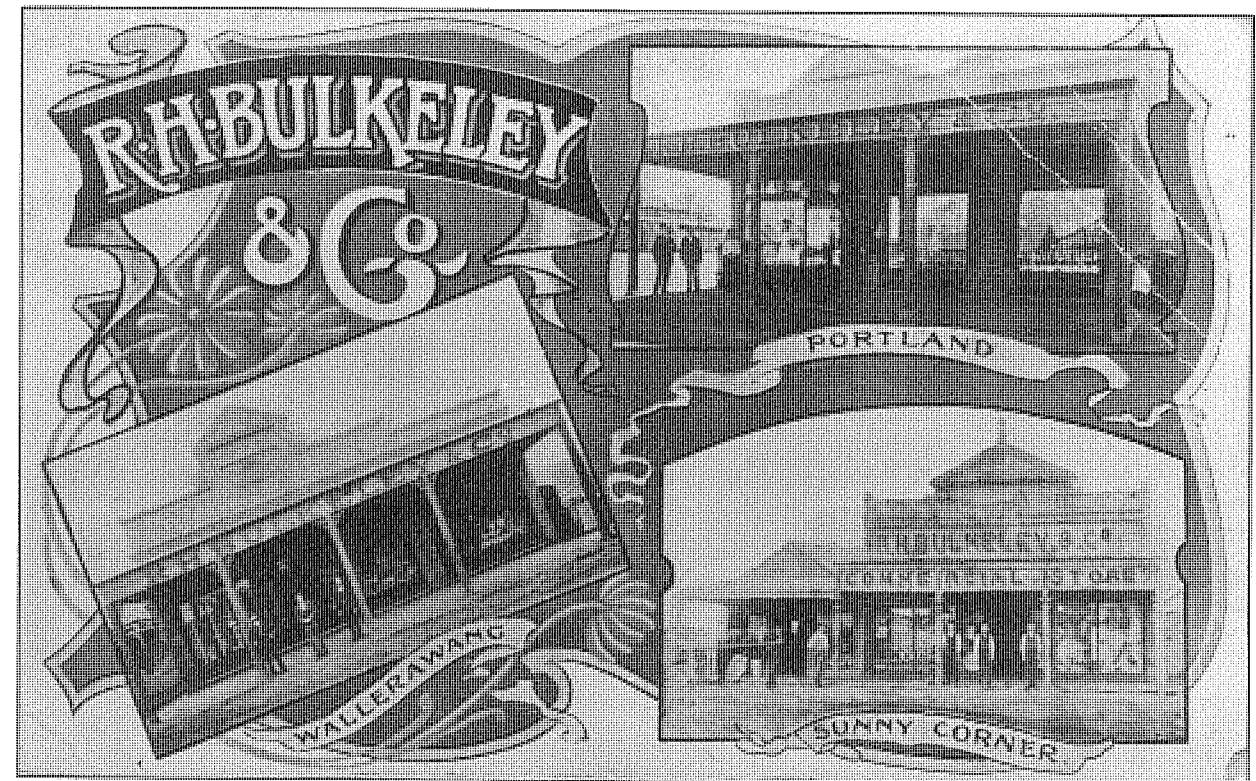
This site included Flagstaff Hill, a high point with altitude of 4,068 feet (1,270 metres). Today there is a trig. point on the same spot. This new town was to be known as Sunny Corner – the existing township was at that time officially named Mitchell. The new site was said to be admirable, and superior to Mitchell because it was, for one thing, closer to the two main mines (Sunny Corner silver mine and Silver King mine). These latter day property developers also claimed that their new township was much better laid out, unlike the straggling main street of the existing township. The allotments were advertised 16th January, 1886, in the *Sydney Mail*. The reporter wrote:

Despite the general dullness, however, a new township has been laid out in the neighbourhood of the Silver Queen ground, and it has taken to itself the name of Sunny Corner, alleging that the older township has abandoned the name. It was a surprise to me one day, when struggling across a steep wooded range, to come suddenly upon a number of 'desirable allotments' marked off, with streets destitute of inhabitants, and leading from one part of the silent bush to another.

The second township seemed destined to failure. It was criticised for the small blocks of land offered. They were thought to be unsuitable for a country town, where many people owned a milking cow and a few goats.

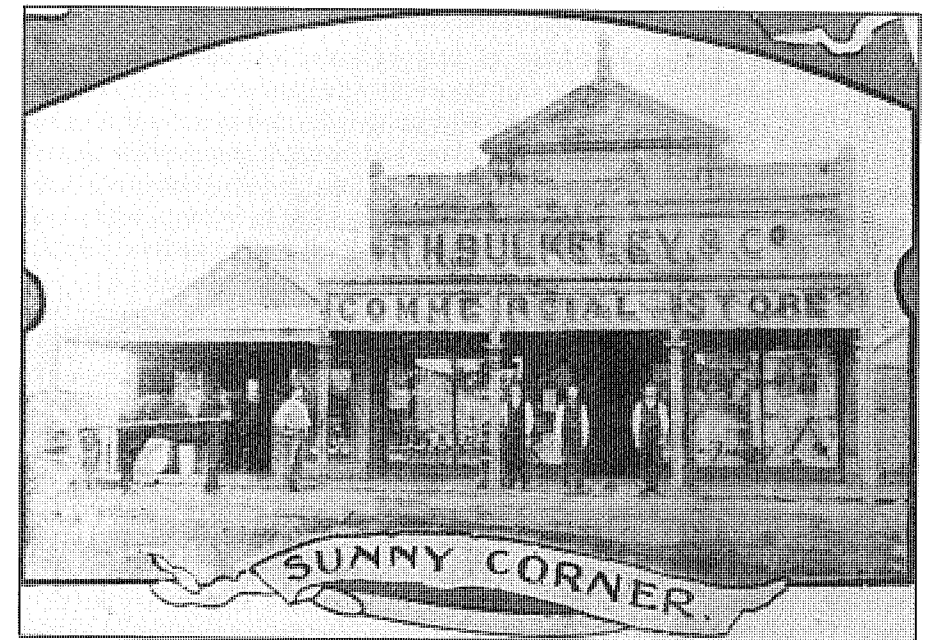
Another aspect not mentioned was the fact that this site would have been directly in line to receive the fallout from the smelters, being just over the hill from the Sunny Corner mine and Silver King mine, both of which were actively smelting at that time.

Today, the 40-acre block for which the Silver Queen company had such high hopes, is now a lush green paddock, where horses quietly graze. During past



Above: Bulkeley also had stores in Portland and Wallerawang. This postcard was postmarked at Wallerawang, 29th April, 1909. Photo courtesy T. Parmenter, Sydney

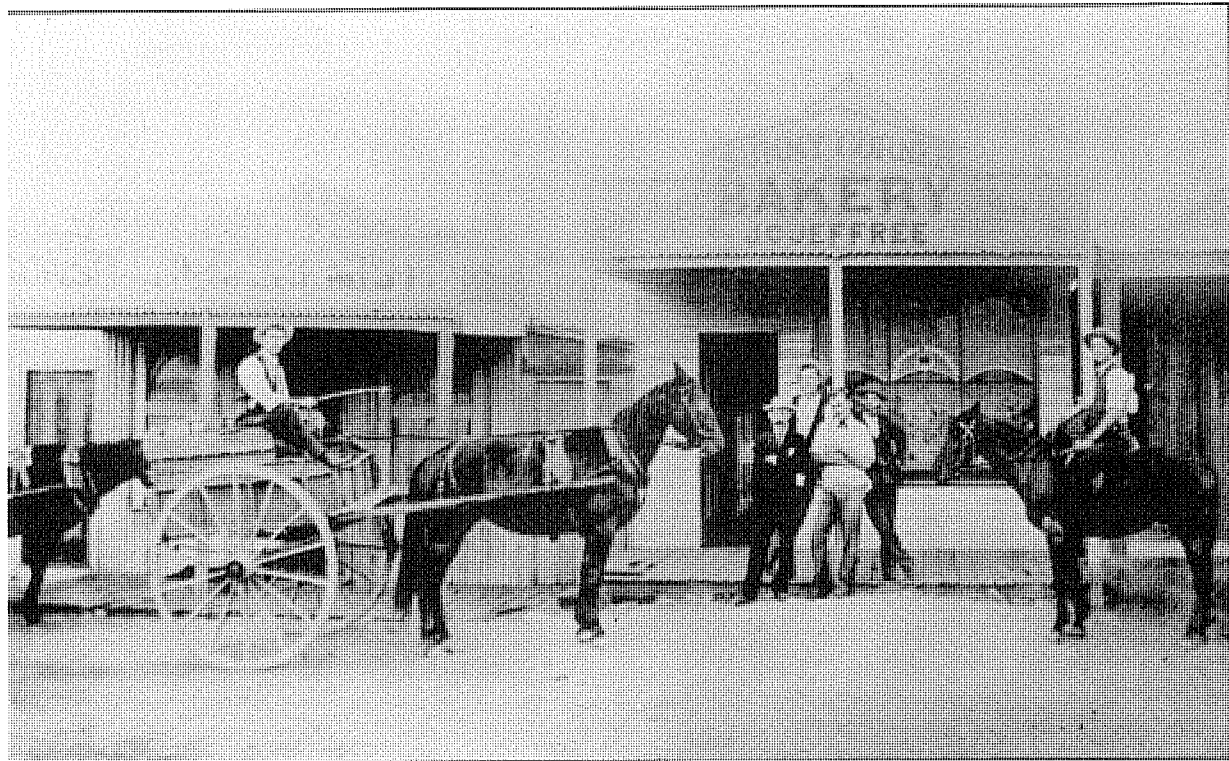
At right: Enlargement of above photo showing the Sunny Corner store.



years of cultivation, the present owner (Col Wilkinson) said he had often ploughed up very old survey pegs.

The old hands called this paddock The Queen. The Chinese once grew vegetables in it after building a dam there. A single cottage now lies in ruins; it was once owned by the Hemsworth family.





Sunny Corner Bakery, J.C. Jeffree (formerly Andy Gardiner's Bakery). Joe Jeffree in cart, Dick Jeffree on horse. Building on left is Consulting Chemist, c1890. Photo by Sibert, Travelling Photographer, courtesy T. Parmenter, Sydney

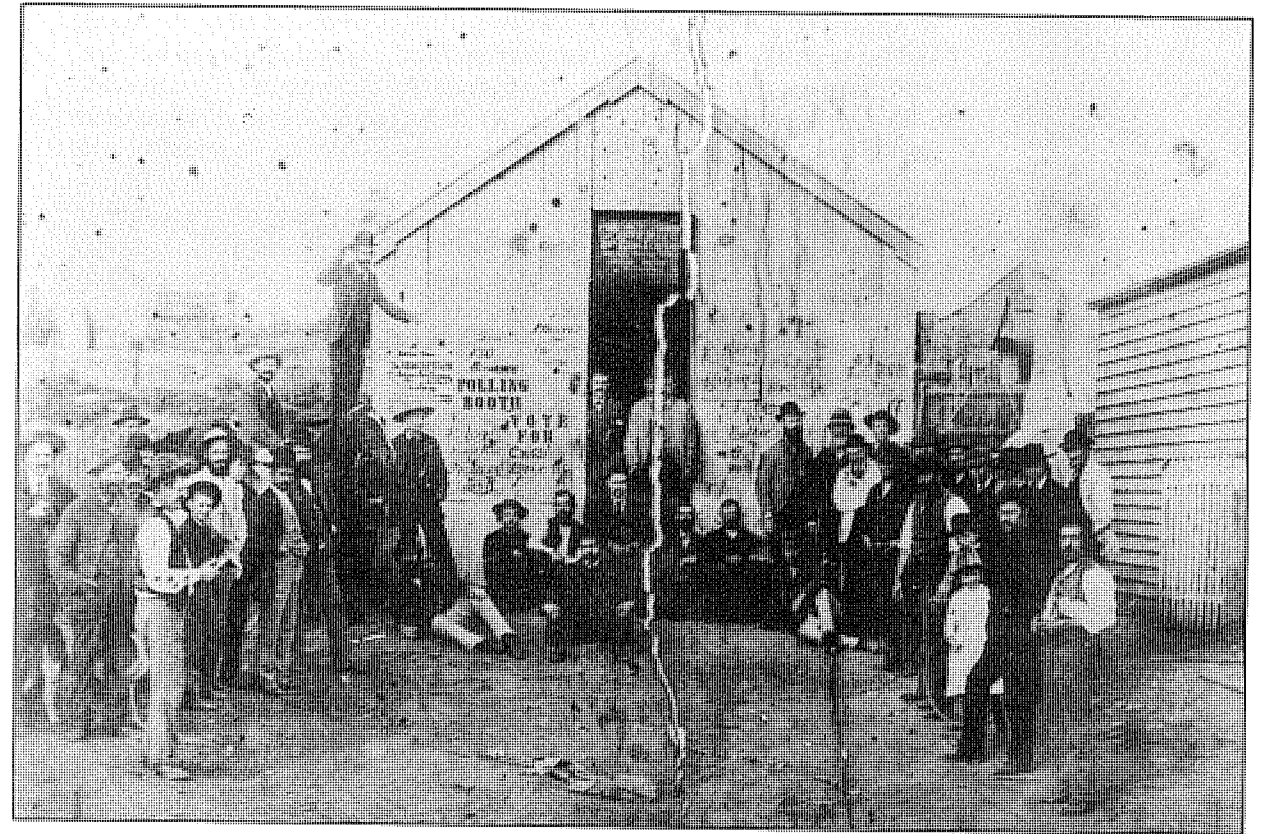
### *Gross Mismanagement and American Excess*

The town of Sunny Corner had been founded upon a vision of unlimited wealth from an endless field of silver. But after only about twelve months or so, the vision began to fade, and more realistic expectations were to emerge.

The Americans had brought silver smelting technology to Australia, and Sunny Corner was the first place in Australia where this technology was tried. There were many Americans in Sunny Corner in 1884 and 1885. Some were university educated, and all were experienced in silver smelting. They carried with them an air of supreme confidence.

Many of them received high wages, up to six times that of a humble miner. Whereas a miner might receive about £16 a month, American consultants were paid from £30 to £90 a month, and often spent £6 a month on cigars. Mr. Llewellyn's Cigar Divan no doubt imported high quality cigars for these men!

Mr. La Monte, who headed the American team, considered that the potential at Sunny Corner was tremendous. Why, in America, he declared, people would be willing to pay \$1,000 per share in the Sunny Corner Silver Mining Company, while here in Australia the same shares changed hands for just £6 each (\$12). Speculation was rife, and some made their fortunes. Men lit their pipes and cigars with £5 notes, and money circulated freely in the town. But what the Americans hadn't counted on were the difficulties later encountered with smelting the silver ore. The Sunny Corner ores behaved differently to the American varieties, and some of the ore proved impossible to treat. Mr. La Monte's own company at Sunny Corner, the Nevada Silver Mining Company, failed with its first attempt at smelting in October, 1885. It caused what was known at the time as "the Nevada scare", and was the first major



Voting Day for the local Progress Association. The building is The Pride of Sunny Corner Lodge No. 336, The Good Templars, late 1880s. Photo courtesy Bruce McPhail, Lithgow

failure on the Sunny Corner field. A shock wave of nervousness passed through all the other fledgling silver mines at Sunny Corner, and even reached Broken Hill where Mr. La Monte was in the process of installing the first silver smelters of that region. But because he had left Sunny Corner prior to the failure of the Nevada smelter, he was able to pin the blame onto someone else. Cries of "gross mismanagement!" were uttered by those speculators who had lost heavily in their share dealings. In fact, it was not so much mismanagement as the sheer lack of suitable technology.

### *Flights by Moonlight*

The "moonlight flit" was occurring with increasing regularity during 1887, as families who were in debt and out of work departed from the town. During 1887 work continued at the Sunny Corner silver mine, but none of the other silver mines were working at all, and many men had lost their jobs.

Mr. McPhail, the headmaster of the Sunny Corner Public School, reported that eighteen families had left the district during the past few months, and school fees totalling over £8 had been left unpaid. He explained to the Department of Education authorities why he had been unable to collect these fees, in December, 1887:

In a mining township of mushroom growth, more especially when it is declining as this is, it is a rare thing for anyone to be aware of the intended departure of a family, for unusual care is taken to prevent too confiding storekeepers, butchers, etc., knowing anything about a departure until it is



an accomplished fact. These departures generally occur during the night, and the pegs to which the tent had been secured, or the unoccupied humpy, is all that meets the eyes of sorrowing friends (the business people aforesaid) who should happen to call next day, while the family are rejoicing on their way to some other mining locality, there to repeat the same successful and fascinating experiments in cheap living. In a place like this such flights occur almost weekly. In some few instances, where I had become aware of intended removal and asked for fees, I was told that 'they had no money', or 'what money they had they wanted to take them somewhere else', or 'they wouldn't pay it', emphasising their refusal with personal abuse of myself.

### *Renewed Prosperity*

Despite the rumblings of discontent, the town of Sunny Corner still had quite a lot to offer. There were jobs for between 300 and 400 men at the Sunny Corner silver mine, and the Silver King mine came good again in 1888, employing a further seventy or so men. The next four years were to be quite prosperous ones, if rather more sedate than the early years – men no longer lit their cigars with £5 notes, they were just thankful to have a job.

On 12th May, 1888, a journalist wrote in the *Town and Country Journal*:

After an absence of 30 months, I have again visited Sunny Corner. One could scarcely imagine as great a change in a township and the general appearance of a place as has occurred here. On the occasion of my last visit, the place was full of visitors from the great centres of this and adjacent colonies, all of whom appeared anxious to take up or purchase interests in mineral leases... Money was freely circulated, and made merry the hearts of speculators, and caused them to estimate at thousands, properties which cost them but a few pounds. Now, however, the scene is changed. The township is quiet, orderly and peaceful. The police officers are there, but their services are not required except on very special occasions... There are nine hotels, several stores, all of which seem to be doing a steady trade, and four churches. The courthouse and police quarters are really capital buildings. The streets are well formed and metalled with quartz which contains 2 pennyweight of gold to the ton. Sunny Corner is built on a hill, and is 4,150 feet above the sea level. It is prettily situated, and charming mountain scenery is obtainable from almost any part of the town. The climate is cold, clear, and invigorating.

### *The Final Years*

The Silver King was mined out by the end of 1890. Then, after a flurry of activity at the Sunny Corner silver mine during 1890 and 1891 when the works were considerably extended, the price of silver collapsed. After all the years of agonizing experiments in ore treatment, resulting in some successes, the Sunny Corner Mine was now to be condemned as uneconomic due to circumstances quite beyond the control of the mine owners.

It could be said that both the rise and the fall of the Sunny Corner Silver Mining Company was due to the Americans. It was they who introduced the silver smelting technology to Sunny Corner in 1884, and it was also the Americans who caused the crash in the price of silver in 1892.



Sunny Corner blacksmith, 1880s. Photo courtesy Martin family, Dark Corner

American monetary policy decreed that silver would be dropped from their money standard, and that only gold would be used. This meant that America would no longer be the main purchaser of Australia's silver, and as a consequence of this, the price of silver almost halved during the next couple of years.

The Sunny Corner silver mine never recovered from this final blow, although it did continue in fits and starts for a number of years to come. About 100 men were employed from 1893 to 1897, but this meant that 300 men had lost their jobs.

On 15th August, 1893, *Bathurst Free Press and Mining Journal* reported:

A good deal of distress prevails among us, but there are not wanting those who are always ready and willing to use their endeavours in alleviating the sufferings of the poor. A relief committee is now engaged soliciting subscriptions in aid of the distressed, and it is hoped by this means, that their hardships will be considerably minimised.

Affairs generally are in a very bad state here, with little or no hope of an improvement. Numbers who had hitherto refrained from leaving the district, in anticipation of a revival in the mining industry are gradually clearing out houses and disappearing one by one, and each day seems to add to the quietude of the place generally.

There were always rumours circulating that the mine would reopen on a



Sunny Corner Butcher's Shop (Sparks'), as it appeared about 1980, now demolished. Photo courtesy Iris Collins, Sunny Corner

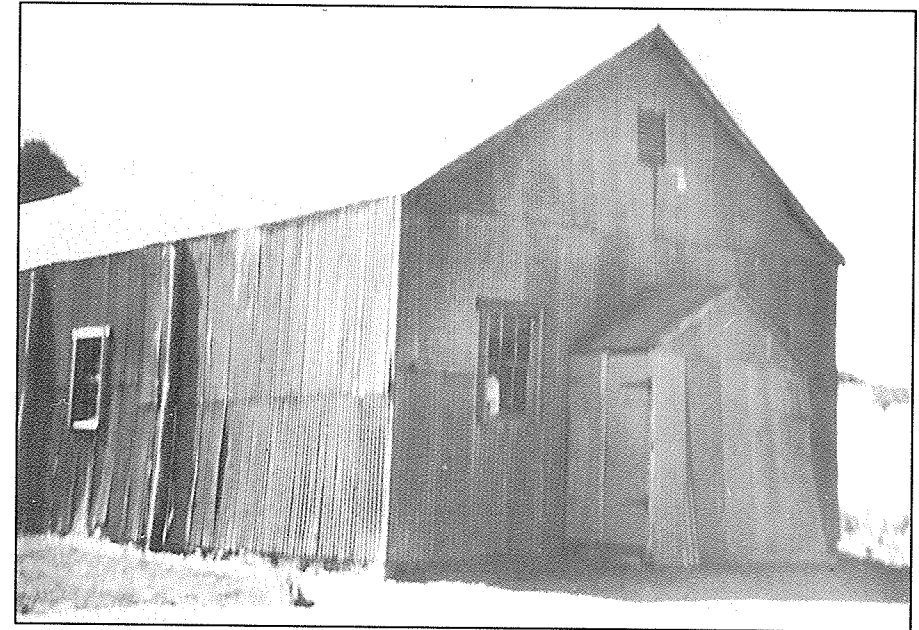
grand scale, but it was never to be. Some men turned to gold mining, but many families left town. In 1900 the mine again employed forty men, but by 1902 the mine was as good as closed for the next ten years.

By 1902, the Commonwealth Portland Cement Company had started up their cement works, and the town of Portland was officially gazetted in 1906. Sunny Corner folk began to drift towards Portland – and so did their homes, which were dismantled, loaded onto horse-drawn wagons, carted over dirt roads to Portland, and re-assembled again. One by one the hotels closed, and the shops and stores and banks and billiard saloons closed. The lively little township of Sunny Corner was fading away.

However, there were still 100 children enrolled at the local school in 1904,



Sunny Corner tinsmiths, late 1880s. Photo courtesy Bruce McPhail, Lithgow



At right: The Sunny Corner Hall, once known as the Victoria Hall, which stood next to Weinert's Hotel. This photograph was taken shortly before the hall was completely rebuilt, about 1960. Photo courtesy T. Parmenter, Sydney

Below: F. Nicholl, Watchmaker and Jeweller, about 1886. Photo courtesy Carolyn Bunnell, Lidcombe

and the town was to linger on for many years. The district gradually turned from mining to rural pursuits, and an account of life in Sunny Corner after 1900 is given in another chapter.





### *The Journey to Sunny Corner*

So far no mention has been made of the journey that people used to make to reach Sunny Corner, of the bad roads and the horse and bullock teams plying back and forth, and the horse-drawn buggies and coaches bringing visitors to the town. Some descriptions of this journey are now given. A newspaper cutting around August, 1884, reveals:

Goods traffic passing through Rydal Railway Station has increased by nearly 1,000 percent. In February they handled 40 tons of freight per month. In September it will be 400 tons per month. This is due solely to the mine at Sunny Corner, and the tonnage is largely made up of building materials, machinery parts, boilers, coke, eatables and so on. There are from 15 to 20 teams upon the road between Rydal and Sunny Corner. Each team makes about 3 trips per week. The standing grievance is the state of the road from Meadow Flat, which has never been metalled. The passenger traffic is likewise rapidly increasing, and Mr. Moore, of the Royal Hotel at Rydal is constantly conveying people to the new rush by means of horses and buggies.

The *Sydney Morning Herald* reported on 22nd December, 1884:

The visitors left Sydney by special train on Friday night and reached Rydal early on Saturday morning. The remainder of the journey was done in buggies along a good road, as country roads go, and through some very pretty scenery. The features of the country are quiet and settled, and its gentle undulations, dotted with briar bushes in profuse bloom, remind one of glimpses of Tasmanian valleys or their English counterparts. There is some farming carried on in the surrounding district.

*Town and Country Journal*, 11th October, 1884:

The most convenient method of reaching Sunny Corner from Sydney is to proceed by train to Rydal, whence the mailcar runs to the new township. A wagonette also leaves about every second day, starting from Mr. T.J. Moore's Royal Hotel, Rydal, the distance being about 17 miles. From Bathurst the mines are reached by means of Messrs. Cobb & Co's coaches, a distance of 25 miles. From Rydal, the road is very good for the first nine miles, passing through Mt. Lambie and Meadow Flat, the land on either side in the valleys being well cultivated, oats occupying the largest area; several small orchards are also noticable on the line of route. The latter part of the journey is over a bush track, which the greatly increased traffic of late – the generality of the teams passing being very heavily laden with timber, coke, lime, etc., for the various works now being carried on – has cut up the way considerably, and in wet weather it must be very heavy. At this time of the year the scenery is much enlivened by the large quantities of yellow wattle beheld on either side... At present all cartage goes by way of Rydal, but the Government are going to open a road to Piper's Flat, about 8 miles from the mine. It is, however, probable that a tramway will be put down by private enterprise.

June, 1885, newspaper cutting:

The Western trains convey visitors to Rydal, which is within 15 miles of Sunny Corner. The remainder of the journey is accomplished by the coach, which runs from Moore's Royal Hotel every day with the mail. Sunny

Corner is also reached via Bathurst, by Donnelly's line of coaches, which run twice daily. The road from Rydal diverges at a place known as Meadow Flat, and passes through the bush. Between Meadow Flat and Sunny Corner, the road is in a most disgraceful condition, being impassable to teams and light vehicles. Teams loaded with coke or stores for the miners, or for the inhabitants, have to go round by Yetholme, seven miles out of their way, in order to reach their destination. More than one of these teams, loaded with valuable stores, have either been bogged or upset. A new road is in the course of construction from the 'Corner' to Piper's Flat, a distance of about 11 miles. With the exception of a piece of metalled road running through the main street of the township, and the roads leading thence to the Sunny Corner and Nevada mines, there is not a passable piece of high road between Meadow Flat and Sunny Corner, so that this new and thriving place is practically isolated from the rest of the world.

The road from Sunny Corner to Piper's Flat railway station was described by the Department of Public Works, in May 1885, as "a good summer road", (meaning a quagmire in winter!). And the road up to Sunny Corner from Meadow Flat was greatly improved with a grant of £2,000 from the government in June 1885. The road to Mitchell's Creek had always been via Yetholme, and it was only in about 1884 that a track had been cut directly from Meadow Flat to Sunny Corner.

### *Tramway*

Right from the start of the silver mine it was proposed to construct a railway or tramway from Sunny Corner down to Piper's Flat. Goods could be brought up to Sunny Corner from the railway station at Piper's Flat, the direct distance being only seven or eight miles, compared with the seventeen miles to Rydal railway station. This would solve the problem of the hazardous and boggy roads as the teamsters would no longer be needed.

In 1884, at a gathering of dignitaries at Sunny Corner just after the new silver mine had been opened, a representative from the N.S.W. Government Railways made an eloquent speech suggesting the likelihood of a government-sponsored railway line being built to Sunny Corner. At this same function, held at Mr. Tasker's Royal Exchange Hotel, there were extravagant predictions being made about Sunny Corner's future. These heady speeches were punctuated by numerous toasts and bursts of loud applause.

But there was no further action regarding the railway as far as the New South Wales railway department was concerned.

A number of other ideas were considered. In July 1885 a suggestion was made to build a wire rope suspension tramway, and in September that year the Americans designed a three-foot gauge tramway, of a type used in America. A further suggestion was made, in October, that a tramway could be made with a wider gauge to match the government railway gauge, and rail trucks could be sent directly to Sunny Corner without the necessity for unloading and reloading at Piper's Flat.

By 1888, an optimistic year, we find the directors of the Sunny Corner silver mine contemplating spending some £25,000 on the construction of a tramline between Sunny Corner and Piper's Flat. A route was surveyed.

And in 1889, local Sunny Corner citizens formed the Sunny Corner Railway



League. The railway, they said, would provide cheap freightage for fuel and fluxes for the mine, and this would help Sunny Corner to become one of the chief mining centres of New South Wales. The Department of Mines reported in 1889:

Sunny Corner was never firmer than at the present time, and with every likelihood of a light line of railway being constructed from Piper's Flat station to Sunny Corner in a short time by private enterprise, I cannot see but the place has a good and permanent future before it...

In 1890 the tramway was "still under consideration" by the mine directors, and an estimated £6,000 a year would be saved in cartage if it went ahead.

Presumably it was decided that the tramway was too costly, and besides, the roads had been improved considerably in 1890. The directors had not foreseen the impending closure of their mine in 1893 however, as they were at that time spending a lot of money developing and improving the mine. But they never made mention of the tramway again.

#### *Entertainment – 1880s and 1890s*

The reader may well imagine that Sunny Corner, in its heyday, was a rather rowdy and undisciplined mining town, with plenty of hard drinking and brawling – there were, after all, eight hotels in the town. But there were also four churches, and somehow this seemed to balance things out. Most people went to church in those days.

True, there were some early reports of fights and loutish behaviour when the first pub opened – larrikins had entered the Royal Hotel and began to throw missiles, and even in the presence of females! But the opening of a police station soon brought such behaviour under control and the more peaceful citizens of Sunny Corner could rest easy at night. Occasionally a report would be made of "bands of youths who are often seen congregated around shop fronts and in the street, frequently using language that is anything but polite". These louts threw a stone through the window of Mrs. Morpeth's Fish and Oyster Saloon, with a piece of glass striking Mrs. Morpeth in the eye. An early arrest was expected, or as the press put it, "the police will shortly pounce upon the perpetrator of this dastardly action."

The miners, however, had neither time nor energy to spare for such skylarking. They all worked a standard twelve-hour shift and would have arrived home exhausted, longing for a bath and a meal and a sleep. Any spare time was devoted to their families. The silver mine was worked twenty-four hours a day and seven days a week; once the smelters were lit up, they would be kept alight for months at a time. All the men connected with smelting operations would have to take turns at doing night shift and working on Sundays.

Saturday night was the liveliest night of the week. This was when all the gold miners from outlying areas came into town to do their shopping and probably have a few drinks at the pub. There was Saturday night shopping then, and business was always brisk. This would be the night when the Sunny Corner miners' brass band would play, sometimes parading in the town. Moonlight nights were good for this, but there was also kerosene street lighting. And there would be organised boxing and wrestling matches and athletic displays.



The Sunny Corner Brass Band, about 1890 or later. James Martin is standing at left. Photo by G.F. Jenkinson, Broken Hill, courtesy Martin family, Dark Corner

Men could play billiards at either of the two billiard saloons, or partake in some socializing at one of the hotels. These hotels provided meals and accommodation to the many visitors who came to Sunny Corner to inspect the new silver mine, and they also supplied plenty of drinks for the thirsty locals.

But the Wesleyan Church condemned the hotels as reported on 22nd July, 1896 in the *Bathurst Free Press and Mining Journal*: "how could men with a thirst for drink be expected to walk past seven public houses in a small place like Sunny Corner?" they argued. Drink was forbidden to Wesleyan Church members and dancing too was frowned upon, while the concept of the nobility of the work ethic was central to their doctrine. This seemed to suit the miners, it gave them dignity and hope, and the Wesleyan Church was surprisingly popular. So while the Catholics would celebrate St. Patrick's Day with a race meeting, a few drinks, and a dance at night, the Wesleyans would denounce such behaviour as scandalous!

Instead, the Wesleyans offered Sunday School picnics (for the whole family), a church choir, and many concerts often featuring the church's own Band of Hope. There were tea meetings and special Christmas activities, and of course, services twice every Sunday.

Mr. Richard Lean, a lay preacher with the Wesleyan Church at Sunny Corner, often provided picture shows where lantern slides would be projected onto a large screen. The projecting system was referred to as "a Biunial Lantern, illuminated by Oxyhydrogen Lime Light". Of course there was no

electricity then. This "limelight" was in fact a very brilliant gas light, created by a single flame directed onto a ball of quicklime – hence limelight. Mr. Lean always was one for the latest technology!

These picture shows with their "dissolving views" took the place of today's movies and television. They were held quite regularly in either Mr. Lean's own hall which was next to his general store, or in Mr. Weinert's Victoria Hall. The audiences just packed in, and comprised of the miners and their wives and children and other townsfolk. Usually there was a small charge for a charitable cause, and Mr. Lean also did a little advertising for his Beehive Stores with specially made up slides which were flashed onto the screen at regular intervals.

Various sets of pictures would be shown, with such titles as "The Pilgrim's Progress" (religious), "The Bengalese Picnic" (humorous), "The Fugitive Slaves" (topical, depicting slave life in America), "Christmas in the Old Country" (nostalgia), "The Vice of Intemperance" (moral), views of general interest such as "English, Colonial and Continental Scenery", "Shipping Views", "Optical Effects" and so on. There might be about fifteen or twenty "views" in each set, and of course a good orator was required, Mr. Lean being well suited to this task. At one of his shows it was reported that "the lecturer kept the audience spellbound for a solid two hours, and might have been going yet if the gas had held out". Mr. Lean also showed his own photographic transparencies, "taken by himself on the spot" at the 1888 Centennial Exhibition in Melbourne. There were also views of the streets of Melbourne, and of the Victorian countryside. The Sunny Corner audience, being much less well-travelled, were highly appreciative.

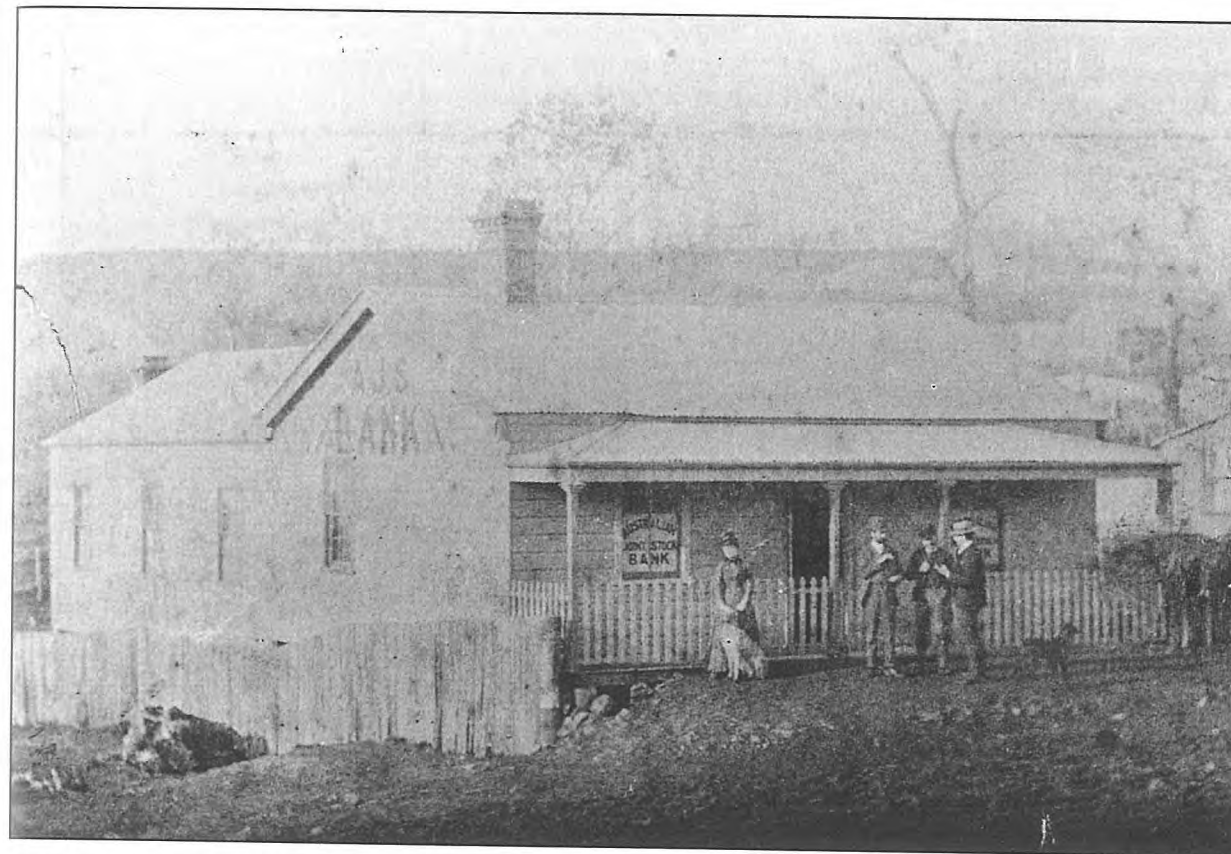
Then there was the town band, comprising it was said, of twenty-seven most talented performers. The Cousin Jack miners were especially keen on bands, and any self respecting Cornishman would strive to be accomplished on a cornet, euphonium, trombone or other brass instrument, or at the very least, enjoy listening to others playing them.

There were always musical nights, when everyone was expected to take part. These amateur performances provided a never-ending source of entertainment. People would sing, play the mouth-organ or concertina, or perhaps the piano, violin or flute. They would act in dramatic or humorous sketches and plays, they debated and narrated and recited poetry, and anyone could join in a sing-a-long.

Sometimes professional performers passed through the town. These included The Electric Variety Company with ten members singing and clog-dancing, doing acrobatics and comedy sketches; The Sao Minstrels with blackened faces and comedy routines and songs, and The Elton Family of comedians. The Shepherd Comic Opera Company featured the singing of both sacred and sentimental pieces, the latter were described as "comic, without being vulgar". Small travelling circuses would pitch their tents at the football ground, opposite Weinert's Hotel, and sometimes larger circuses such as Wirth's and Ashton's would visit from Sydney.

The racing of local horses was popular, and the town had its own racecourse where picnic race meetings were held.

Cricket was especially popular and regular matches were held at the cricket ground (today's recreation ground). The Sunny Corner team would play other teams in the district, such as Meadow Flat, Palmer's Oakey, Dark Corner and



The A.J.S. Bank at Sunny Corner, late 1880s. Photo courtesy Bruce McPhail, Lithgow

Limekilns, or failing that, they would play against themselves with Married vs. Singles, and Miners vs. Town.

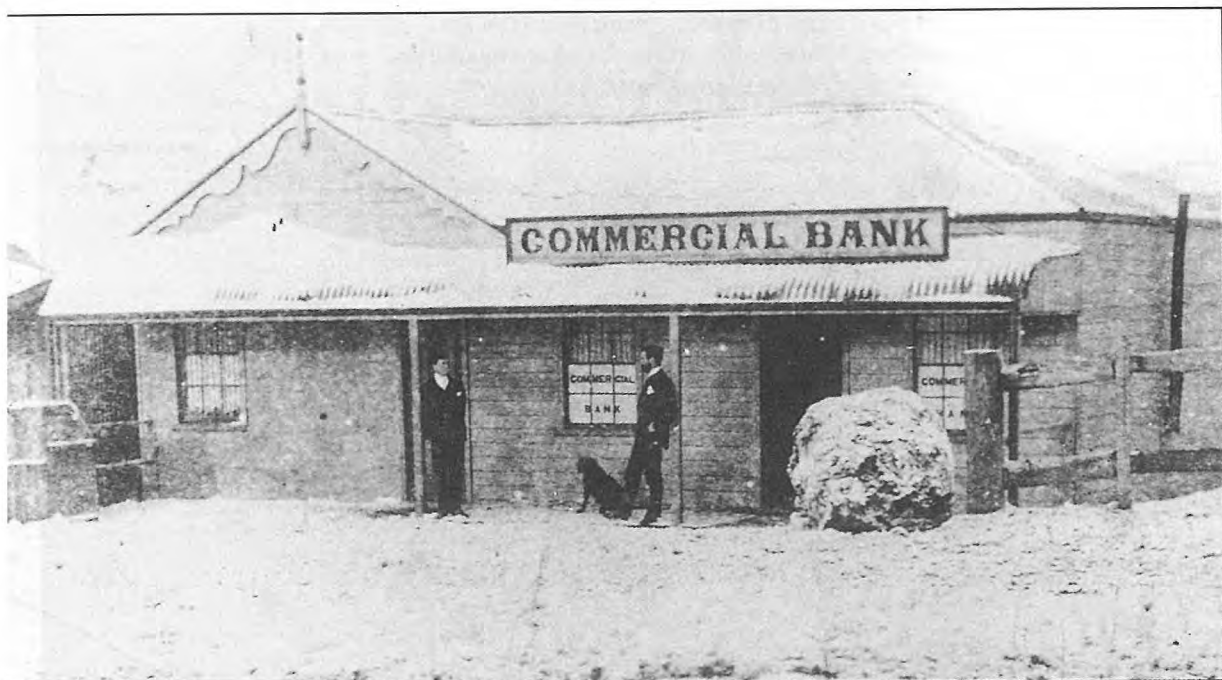
The League of Wheelmen was formed in the 1890s when the craze of cycling took a strong hold in the town. "Cycling appears to be all the rage in Sunny Corner just now, and those who do not as yet possess bikes are busy learning the art of balancing upon the 'wheels'" (13th July, 1895, *Bathurst Free Press and Mining Journal*).

School sports days were held at the cricket ground and were eagerly looked forward to by the children. They raced in bare feet and feasted on picnic fare.

A tennis club was formed in 1897 and the members played on a court next to the cricket ground.

By the late 1890s, one of the hotels had just obtained one of the new-fangled Edison phonographs with which to entertain their patrons. Jack Martin vividly remembered his first sighting of it when he was a boy. It was the first phonograph ever to come to Sunny Corner, and Frank Havenhand was its proud owner. Jack's father was a good friend of Frank Havenhand, so Jack and his brother were invited over from Dark Corner especially to hear this phonograph. It was a rare treat for Jack to visit Sunny Corner, and the cause for this occasion was to be "a surprise", they knew not what. So on this special Saturday night, the boys waited breathless with excitement, seated at the hotel bar. The phonograph was produced and set up on the bar in front of them, the speaker facing them. Some gurgling sounds began to come from the speaker. With lightning reflexes and suspecting trickery, the boys let out a yell and leapt





The Commercial Bank at Sunny Corner, after snow, late 1880s. Photo courtesy Bruce MacPhail, Lithgow

out of the way, expecting water to come spurting forth from the machine. Nobody ever heard the record, said Jack, as they were all laughing too much! Such were the entertainments of our forebears, in Sunny Corner in the 1880s and 1890s.

#### *Bank Robbery – “The Sunny Corner Sensation”*

“It was all done for a joke”, claimed the youthful bank teller when charged with stealing over £800 from his employer, the A.J.S. Bank of Sunny Corner, in November 1894.

It should first be mentioned that the teller, twenty-one-year-old William Owen, was a local lad, once a star pupil in the Wesleyan Sunday School, and also for a time he had been pupil-teacher at the Sunny Corner Public School. Did the lad just succumb to the temptation to play a foolhardy prank on the bank manager, Mr. Tattam? Or was his motive far more serious?

Mr. Tattam had returned to the bank at 1 p.m. after his lunch break, to find William Owen lying on the floor, apparently unconscious. The safe was open and bank notes were strewn on the floor. Sergeant Wright and Dr. Grady were immediately called.

William Owen said he was hit on the head with a stick by a man who’d entered the bank. Mr. Tattam counted the money to see what was missing, while Sergeant Wright and Dr. Grady examined the teller for injuries. As young Owen seemed quite uninjured, the sergeant searched him. There were coins in his waistcoat pocket, but, said Owen, twelve shillings of that belonged to the cricket club, and four shillings and sixpence was his own money.

The sergeant then asked the teller to remove his boots, and there he found £50 in bank notes stuffed into one of them. “Mr. Wright, I don’t know how the money got into my boots” the young teller claimed. A large amount of money was still missing, and the teller then produced a canvas bag full of gold and

silver coins and banknotes, which had been hidden behind some boxes. An amount of £10 was still missing, and a search of Owen’s other boot revealed £10 in bank notes stuffed into the toe of it. Owen stuck to his story that it was all done as a joke on Mr. Tattam. But he was arrested and charged with the theft of £872/15/6. The incident caused, it was said, “a profound sensation” in Sunny Corner.

#### THE NAMING OF SUNNY CORNER

Many people ask how Sunny Corner got its name, especially when the weather turns cold and bleak and snowy! We may never know for sure, but the following stories have been put forth.

From *Ghosts of the Goldfields*, by Henry Neary, 1940:

Sunny Corner derived its name from the following incident: Two brothers, named Scott, were driving a flock of sheep across the rough hills that lie between Rydal and Capertee, one day in the early 1850s. It was very cold, and a heavy frost lay on the ground as they passed through Rydal in the morning, so they decided as they proceeded through the ranges to select a cosy spot for their camp at night. Some twenty miles or so from Rydal there is a plot of land that can be seen from any of the high ridges on the track to Capertee where the sun seems to shine at all hours throughout the day; and when an argument arose between the two brothers as to where they would camp the sheep for the night, one suggested one place, and the other said: ‘What about that little sunny corner over there.’ They camped there, and ever after referred to the spot as Sunny Corner.

The Scott brothers certainly were in the district at that time, and they were farmers and ran sheep, so perhaps this story is true.

Richard Lean, who was a resident in this district from 1875 until after 1900, wrote in his memoirs (article, *Lithgow Mercury*, 31st March 1937):

Sunny Corner – The origin of its name? This might never be discovered. ‘The Corner’ itself is on high land – higher than Mitchell’s Creek and roughly shaped like an amphitheatre. The story goes that sheep always followed the sun round, so that, whether at early morn or the day’s end, they were always to be found in a spot where the sun’s rays played. Hence the shepherds’ title which suggests cosiness and warmth at an altitude of more than 4,000 feet, where the air is particularly keen. Doubtless from the name Sunny Corner sprang Dark Corner and Daylight Creek, nearby mining centres.

So it would seem that the name Sunny Corner derived more from the altitude of the place rather than its climate, which is often bitterly cold. To stand on top of the hill above the old mine at sunset, and to see that all the surrounding distant hills are already under the blue shadow of twilight, while the mine hill itself still glows in warm yellow sunlight, makes the higher altitude of Sunny Corner obvious to the viewer. Dark Corner was so named (according to the Martin family of Dark Corner), because there is a mountain there which receives very little sunlight during the wintertime.

The name Sunny Corner has stayed with the district since very early times. A government decision to name the town Mitchell resulted in failure, the locals preferred the older name that they had always used. And the main silver



mine was of course run by the Sunny Corner Silver Mining Company which had taken its name from the name of the district. After three years of being Mitchell, the town name was officially changed back to Sunny Corner. At one time the two names were interchangeable, and must have resulted in some confusion, because the post office, school and police station remained as Mitchell for many years. The smaller, original settlement at Mitchell's Creek was dubbed West Mitchell at the same time that Sunny Corner was officially named Mitchell, and it has been known by this name ever since.

Mitchell's Creek was named after Sir Thomas Livingstone Mitchell who surveyed the gold fields of the Bathurst district in 1851. The original date of naming is unknown, but thought to be during the 1850s. (Another Mitchell's Creek also existed near Wellington).

The town of Mitchell was officially gazetted and named, 7th October, 1884. Sunny Corner was officially renamed on 3rd September, 1887. The post office changed its name from Mitchell to Sunny Corner in 1888, and the public school in 1899.

### SUNNY CORNER HOSPITAL

It was many years after the commencement of the Sunny Corner mine that a hospital was finally built. There were at least two occasions when the building of the hospital was imminent, and the plans then shelved due to the changing fortunes of the mine.

The exact date of the building of the hospital is not quite clear, but it would have been after 1891. Evidence that a hospital was built at all is minimal. But while there is no official confirmation regarding the hospital, there are a number of other definite clues which clearly suggest that the hospital was built:

1. A hill in the township which has always been called Hospital Hill.
2. A hand-drawn memory map from Will Jeffree, showing Sunny Corner township in the 1890s, including hospital buildings. This map has proved remarkably accurate in many other respects.
3. An interview with Mrs. Linda Smith, who clearly remembered that there had been a hospital on the hill behind Bulkeley's Store, although it was no longer standing when she was a girl. Mrs. Smith was born in 1904.
4. A personal inspection of the site of the hospital reveals a few overgrown remnants of a building of some sort, some bricks and slate paving can be seen.
5. Col Wilkinson heard from his father that water was carted to the hospital from a well on the property "Snowline". There may have been a fear of contamination of the town wells either by mine pollution or unsanitary conditions. "Snowline" is now Col's property and is situated one or two kilometres east of the main township.

A brief history of the hospital follows, and has been compiled from various newspaper reports, from 1885 to 1900.

By February 1885, the Progress Committee had applied to the government for two hospital tents and an ambulance (horse-drawn), pending the erection of a hospital.

A description of Sunny Corner township given in the Department of Mines Annual Report for the year ending December, 1885, states: "The village has

among its buildings a public school, 2 churches, a hospital, post and telegraph office, 2 banks, and police quarters, usually called the court house." This description presumably referred to the hospital tents.

In June, 1885, it was reported: "A promise has been made by the Government to erect a public hospital, which is much needed". The government had already granted a block of land – this had been cleared of trees and all the stumps had been taken out, also an excavation had been made for an underground water tank. This work had been done under instruction of the trustees of the hospital, who worked as a committee. The Progress Committee had also submitted a plan of a hospital for the approval of the minister. A large sum of money had been collected towards a hospital fund, which the government had promised to subsidise pound for pound.

But during 1886 there was something of a lull at the silver mines. In September 1886 though, the hospital committee was again active. There were £230 in the hospital funds, and the government had granted the committee possession of the old schoolhouse at Mitchell's Creek for use as a temporary hospital. A further grant of £100 was sought in order to furnish the building. It is not clear if that building was in fact actually used as a hospital, but it seems unlikely. At about this time, there was a population movement away from Sunny Corner, and the majority of the hospital committee was amongst them.

It was not until September 1890 that renewed efforts were made to have a hospital built. This was at a time when the Sunny Corner mine was once more surging ahead. By now there was over £500 in funds, held by the Sunny Corner branch of the Commercial Bank, earning interest. Half of this amount had been raised by benefit nights and donations, and half was a government subsidy. A new hospital committee was elected. By October 1891, after plans had been drawn up by Sydney architects, the committee decided to proceed with the building of one portion of the hospital immediately. Other parts would be added when required, and money available. Tenders were to be called for the erection of the eastern wing, matron's quarters, and kitchen as per the architects plans.

Will Jeffree's map shows three separate buildings at the hospital, so it is highly probable that the hospital portions mentioned above were built, but probably no further additions were made. There is no photo which shows the hospital at Sunny Corner.

Clearly the need for a hospital was long overdue. A report from August 1891, regarding an injured miner, gives a graphic account of the poor man's suffering, due to there being no hospital at Sunny Corner.

The miner, Joseph Rushton, was crushed by a boulder weighing several tons. He was somehow extricated by his fellow miners and taken at once to Havenhand's Hotel in Sunny Corner, where he was attended to by Dr. Henry, who amputated his left foot. The unfortunate miner was then taken to Bathurst Hospital in a horse drawn wagonette, owned and driven by Mr. Richard Lean. Due to his appalling injuries, the miner suffered greatly whilst travelling over the rough dirt road from Sunny Corner, the first section being described as one series of mud holes and ruts. It would have taken many hours to reach Bathurst.

Once at Bathurst Hospital, a further operation was done, to amputate the leg below the knee, with the patient said to be in a very low state through loss of blood and exhaustion. He had a wife and family of eight children. It is not



Robert Waller Magill, a doctor at Sunny Corner from 1884 to about 1920. This photo was taken some time between 1883 and 1891. Photo courtesy Magill family, Bathurst

known if he survived.

There must have been many other mishaps at the mines. It would appear that doctors in the town treated patients just wherever was handy, such as the hotel as mentioned above.

As well as accidents, illnesses such as influenza and typhoid are mentioned. In a separate chapter an account is given of the effects of lead poisoning etc., due to the working conditions of the mines. Women giving birth were most likely attended by other local women who would act as midwives.

So it would seem that the hospital was built in Sunny Corner about 1892, just as the mine was again going into a decline. The hospital may not have had much useage. It had disappeared again some time before 1910. The hospital buildings would most likely have been dismantled and rebuilt elsewhere, as were most of the other buildings of Sunny Corner.

Some of the doctors mentioned, associated with Sunny Corner are given below, along with the date of mention. These names are mostly from newspaper reports in the *Bathurst Free Press and Mining Journal*, or *Sunny Corner Silver Press*, 1886: Dr. Mackintosh, 1886; Dr. J.F. Grady, 1886; Dr. St. George, 1886; Dr. Watts, 1890; Dr. Henry, 1891; Dr. Pardy, 1895; Dr. Moore, of Bathurst, who visited Sunny Corner weekly, early 1890s; and Robert Waller Magill who practised as a doctor and had trained as a chemist in New Zealand. He was known as Dr. Magill to the Sunny Corner residents, and he practised here from 1884 until about 1919. As well as setting broken bones etc., he went in for herbal remedies, and concocted many different brews using local plants.

## HOTELS

### Introduction

When the town of Sunny Corner began in 1884, there was a rush to build hotels there. It was always said by the old hands that there were once fourteen hotels in Sunny Corner, but there is only clear evidence for eight. Probably, legally, there were only eight, but it is quite likely that there were a few other more temporary establishments which also sold alcohol.

To be legal, one had to hold a publican's licence. This would only be granted to reputable citizens, whose hotel premises had passed an inspection. Licence applications were made at the Licensing Court in Bathurst, before a licensing magistrate. Even billiard rooms required a licence.

There were three hotels completed in Sunny Corner by the end of 1884, the Royal, the Royal Exchange, and the Star, and before that, the Miner's Arms had been built at West Mitchell in 1883, (plus two others in the 1860s-70s, since closed). Stephen Swain also seems to have had another hotel in late 1884, as an application for a billiard licence for his public house in Sunny Corner was made in November, 1884. A block of land was held in the name of Stephen William Swain just down from Bulkeley's Store. Perhaps Swain did not stay long, his billiard licence was not granted, and there are no other records of his hotel in Sunny Corner. The Criterion Hotel was opened in mid-1885, and another, the Silver Street Hotel, had been approved in principle by September 1885.

By the end of 1885, the licensing magistrate was showing definite signs of misgiving when the application for a seventh hotel at Sunny Corner was put

before him. The *Bathurst Times* reported in November 1885:

... it was the unanimous decision of the Bench that no more public houses were required at Mitchell (Sunny Corner) – there was every chance of the existing inns degenerating into mere drinking shops if they were largely increased in number.

The seventh applicant was required to produce concrete evidence that a necessity existed for yet another public house. The applicant, Francis Havenhand, was finally able to convince the magistrate, after stating that his proposed hotel would provide high class accommodation for travellers. The existing inns, it was said, provided accommodation that was anything but good!

The Club House Hotel, another late comer, was only allowed to be built as it was just outside the town boundary. The magistrate had similarly balked at the application for this hotel, but could not refuse it as the site was officially "on the road" rather than "in the town", even though it was just opposite the town's cricket ground, and no more than half a kilometre from the centre of the town.

So the eight hotels (plus however many sly grog shanties) were to prosper in Sunny Corner during the 1880s and 1890s. But by around 1900, the town was dying and the hotels were closing. Only four hotels were still standing in about 1910, according to the memory of a resident who was a child in Sunny Corner in 1910. These four hotels were Royal Exchange and Royal (both still open for business), and Weinert's Star Hotel and the Court House Hotel (both closed). By 1920, another resident has recalled that there were only two hotels still standing, the Royal Exchange (which had closed), and the Royal, which closed in 1922. The Royal Exchange was demolished later in the 1920s, leaving only the Royal, which burnt down in 1979.

The known details of all these hotels are now given.

### Star Inn, West Mitchell

In the N.S.W. Gazetteer of 1866 there are two hotels listed at Mitchell's Creek, Lachlan's and the Star Inn. The Star Inn had closed by the mid 1870s.

### McLachlan's Hotel, West Mitchell

This hotel had probably opened well before 1866, along with the Star Inn. (It is listed in N.S.W. Gazetteer of 1866.) Daniel McLachlan is listed as an innkeeper at Mitchell's Creek in the gazetteers of 1872, and 1875-77. The gazetteer of 1875-77 may have been a little out of date, as Daniel McLachlan no longer kept this hotel in 1876 – the licence had been transferred to N. Radburne. A report in the *Freeman's Journal* of August 12th, 1876 states: "There is now only one public house left, and host Radburne is a right jovial fellow, who knows how to keep his house properly and treat his customers well." Radburne sold out to Charles Murray in 1879.

### Murray's Miner's Arms Hotel, West Mitchell

It seems that Charles Murray may have built himself new premises at West Mitchell at some stage. The Murray family had previously been running a hotel at Kirkconnell, with the head of the household being James Murray, Charles' father. James was an Irishman, and his hotel had opened in the 1860s





Formerly Murray's Club House Hotel, this building is still standing at Lewis Ponds (photographed 1989). It is now the residence of Mr. Charles Dwyer. This former hotel once stood at West Mitchell, and was moved to Lewis Ponds in 1888.

or earlier. He died in 1878, aged sixty-eight years. In 1879 Charles, then aged about thirty-three, took over McLachlan's (Radburne's) hotel at West Mitchell. As a matter of interest, the hotel at Kirkconnell is still standing, although it has been moved about a kilometre from its original site. It formerly stood on the property now owned by John Bland, and now stands on a property east of this site.

Charles Murray held a wine licence in 1883, and in that year he applied for a publican's licence, stating that there was no licensed house within fifteen miles of Mitchell's Creek. The publican's licence was not granted. This may have been because the premises he was in were not suitable.

On January 3rd, 1884, Charles Murray again applied for a publican's licence, this time for new premises called The Miner's Arms at Mitchell's Creek. The licence was granted and Murray must have done quite well at this time. Sunny Corner was to boom later that year and his was the only hotel in the district until the Royal Hotel opened in October 1884. Large numbers of visitors were coming to Sunny Corner in that year to inspect the new silver mine, and they were obliged to stay at Murray's Hotel at the old settlement of Mitchell's Creek, some two kilometres west of Sunny Corner itself. The hotel stood around the bend in the road at Mitchell's Creek, some distance past the main group of buildings at that settlement.

Had the Miner's Arms Hotel been situated in the township of Sunny Corner (which hadn't then quite begun), Murray would have done extremely well for many years to come. But he was rather outdone by the eight other hotels which were built right in the middle of Sunny Corner township from late 1884 to 1887.

It would seem that by 1888 Murray was feeling the pinch. His hotel was no longer central, and competition was strong. During 1888 he moved his hotel to Lewis Ponds. There was quite a lot of interest in a new silver mine there, and no doubt Murray thought he would try to get in early. His hotel at Mitchell's Creek was dismantled, loaded onto bullock wagons, and carted to Lewis Ponds (near Orange). The journey must have taken several days. Charles Murray named the rebuilt hotel the Club House Hotel. It is still standing at Lewis Ponds today and is a most substantial weatherboard building, still in

quite good order. Mr. Charles Dwyer lives in the hotel and it was he who recounted some of its former history. Mr. Dwyer also stated that Abraham Lane had moved a hotel from Sunny Corner to Lewis Ponds, and that Carr's Billiard Saloon was also moved from Sunny Corner. It stood next to the Club House Hotel, and was later used as a post office store by the Dwyer family. The billiard saloon was eventually demolished, and Lane's hotel was moved again to Lucknow. The silver mine at Lewis Ponds struck trouble in 1891, and Charles Murray then moved back to Sunny Corner. He left his hotel at Lewis Ponds, and took over the licence of the Royal Exchange Hotel at Sunny Corner in 1892, then moved across the road to the Royal Hotel about 1915. Charles Murray died in 1917, aged seventy. His wife Mary continued to hold the licence for the Royal Hotel at Sunny Corner until 1922.



Royal Hotel, Sunny Corner, 1921. (Enlargement of photo on page 84)

### *Royal Hotel, Sunny Corner*

This hotel was the first to be built in the town of Sunny Corner, and was also the last to close down.

John Varley opened the Royal Hotel on 15th October, 1884. He claimed to be the first man to take up land at Sunny Corner and build on it (although the block was in the name of Matilda Varley!) A newspaper journalist described him as "the pioneer of the place", one of the earliest arrivals, who had built his substantial hotel amidst the wild bush of Sunny Corner, when not a hut was to be seen anywhere. This "perfectly wild speculation" had paid handsomely however, when the town of Sunny Corner boomed, and Mr. Varley netted for



himself a respectable sum during the first few months of business. Obviously Mr. Varley was proud to be the first at Sunny Corner, but Mr. Murray's hotel at West Mitchell had already been doing a brisk trade for the whole of that year, accommodating the numerous visitors to Sunny Corner silver mine.

John Varley had earlier kept a hotel at Capertee, also called the Royal Hotel. Richard Lean's memoirs state that Varley brought the hotel building to Sunny Corner "from a town on the Mudgee line", so it seems reasonable to assume that it was Varley's own Royal Hotel from Capertee, which he had dismantled and brought by bullock wagon across to Sunny Corner.

There was apparently something of a race to get the first hotel opened, Richard Tasker was building his Royal Exchange Hotel just across the road from Varley's Royal Hotel, and it opened just six weeks after Varley's.

The Royal Hotel was a long, weatherboard building, built in a style typical of the era. Many local people at Sunny Corner remember the old building, as it was still standing until 1979, and was a real landmark in the district. It unfortunately burned down, and only the brick chimneys are still left standing.

Soon after the Royal Hotel opened, it was advertised in the *Bathurst Times*: Now Open! The Royal Hotel, Sunny Corner, Mitchell's Creek – John Varley (late of Capertee) begs to inform the Inhabitants, Commercial Gentlemen, and Visitors that he has erected the above spacious and commodious premises, regardless of cost, and is therefore enabled to supply unlimited accommodation to the Public. The Hotel is fitted with large dining and bed rooms, and extensive stabling. This is the terminus of the Mail Coaches now plying regularly from Bathurst and Rydal. We have Two Billiard Tables. The Hotel is in close proximity to the now famous and well established Sunny Corner Silver Mines, and visitors will find every comfort and attention.

Royal Hotel, Sunny Corner, August 1908. Photo by George C. Fraser, courtesy Col Ferguson, Palmer's Oakey



One visitor did not find every comfort and attention, and he took Varley to court over the matter. Varley was fined £3 for "refusing to supply accommodation to a bona fide traveller" in November, 1884. The visitor had, it seems, rather irritated Mr. and Mrs. Varley with his request for a very late evening meal. His manner, said Mr. Varley, was bumptious, rude and unpleasant. The evening meal had already been served between 6 and 7 p.m. The visitor was offered bread, butter, cheese and a glass of water. But the chairman of the Licensing Court told Varley that publicans were expected to do certain things, and a licensed publican was bound to supply refreshment at any hour his house was open. Having been refused a meal at 9 p.m., the visitor had summoned Constable Wright, and it was only then that the bread and cheese had been offered. Varley received only a small fine and did not lose his licence over the matter.

A triangular block of land in front of Varley's Hotel was the site of a boxing and wrestling ring on Saturday nights during the 1880s and 1890s. This ring would be specially roped off, and large crowds gathered to watch the bouts. Some of the contenders were Jack Titus, Dan O'Connor, Jimmy Lamond, Slogger Bill Williams, and Dave Grenfell. Steve Dawson was also a boxer, his family have described him as having "red hair and a squashed nose". He was also one of the local carriers and owned a horse team. He won a number of title fights and no doubt got some practice in the boxing ring outside the Royal Hotel.

There was also a W. Varley, storekeeper, in Sunny Corner, and mention is made of Varley's Stores near the hotel. These stores were possibly in a large building which adjoined the hotel.

John Varley only held the licence at Sunny Corner's Royal Hotel for eighteen months. The licence was transferred to Charles G. Roberts on 5th April, 1886. Mr. Roberts was later to move to the Silver Street Hotel, about 1888. There was a good deal of chopping and changing with the hotels at Sunny Corner! Edward V. Carr was the proprietor of the Royal Hotel in 1888 and 1889. He had previously held a billiard licence and had built a billiard saloon in Sunny Corner about 1884. That building was dismantled, possibly in 1888, and taken to Lewis Ponds where it adjoined Murray's Hotel. Mr. Carr wrote from Sunny Corner, to Mr. Murray at Lewis Ponds in 1889, asking Murray to make an offer for the billiard tables and property at the Ponds – the asking price was £300, so probably this was for the whole building. Carr had been renting out the building prior to this and he had earlier sent a set of billiard balls up to Murray. It seems that Murray did not buy the billiard saloon, as it was sold from Sunny Corner in June 1894 to Mr. Dwyer, storekeeper of Lewis Ponds, for the much reduced sum of £20. Mr. Carr became the proprietor of Tattersalls Hotel in Sunny Corner after he left the Royal Hotel in 1889. Although he had moved his billiard saloon to Lewis Ponds, he had obviously decided to stay in Sunny Corner himself.

The next proprietor of the Royal Hotel was George Francis, in 1890. He was to stay on there for many years. Mr. Varley, by the way, apparently retired and continued to live just next door to the hotel. George Francis weighed in at an immense 26 stone, according to the memoirs of Will Jeffrey. Francis continued to run the hotel until sometime after 1900. William G.S. Francis became the owner/proprietor about 1907 and stayed until about 1915, when Charles Murray became the new owner/proprietor. At that time, the Royal became the

only hotel still in business in Sunny Corner. Charles Murray died in 1917, aged seventy, and his wife Mary took over the licence until 2nd March 1922. An article appeared in the *Sydney Daily Telegraph* on that date:

**Sunny Corner's Decline** – The Royal Hotel was closed on Tuesday. Its licensee, Mrs. Murray, has been in the Hotel business for 42 years without interruption. She first occupied an hotel at West Mitchell then moved to Lewis Ponds and then to Sunny Corner whose meteoric growth she witnessed and also its gradual decline, until she felt compelled to close her own well-known and well-kept hostelry.

Mrs. Murray was paid £700 for the licence by the Licencing Court and she was promised that her family would receive prior rights to a licence if the place ever boomed again, but of course it did not.

Some years later the hotel was purchased from the Murray family by Mrs. Tattersall. She and her son Jack lived at the hotel for many years. Mrs. Tattersall's husband had been killed in a mine at Cullen Bullen, and as she had originally come from Sunny Corner, she decided to move back again. When she died the property passed to her son, who rented it out to a number of different families during the 1950s. In the 1960s the Woodsford family purchased the property from Jack Tattersall with the intention of turning it into a guest house. There were some legal problems with Mrs. Tattersall's will and this caused a delay of seven years before the Woodsford family legally owned the hotel. By that time, at the end of the 1960s, the hotel was in such a dilapidated state as to be almost beyond repair – the floorboards inside had rotted right through, and the money for restoration work had been eaten up in legal fees. Also, the Woodsford family had left Sunny Corner and started a business elsewhere.

The hotel remained as a landmark in the town. It had been Sunny Corner's first hotel, and now it lingered on as the last hotel, all the others having been removed many years before. It formed a definite link with Sunny Corner's past and was much admired for these evocative qualities by both visitors and local people.

On a hot and windy day in March 1979 the end came. A fire started accidentally just nearby and raced through the long dry grass surrounding the hotel. The whole building was soon enveloped in fierce flames as the tinder-dry weatherboards burnt. Two brick chimneys now mark the spot where this grand old hotel once stood.

#### *Royal Exchange Hotel, Sunny Corner*

Both the Royal Exchange Hotel and Weinert's Star Hotel opened on 24th November, 1884, becoming the second and third hotels to open in Sunny Corner after Varley's Royal Hotel. The Royal Exchange Hotel stood next to where the Sunny Corner Fire Brigade shed stands today, on the corner of Austral Street and the main road.

Thomas William Tasker applied for a conditional licence on October 13th, 1884 – his premises were to be finished in a matter of ten days. At that stage, Weinert had not even begun building his Star Hotel. Due to some delays in the Licensing Court, it was another six weeks before Tasker received his licence. By that time, Weinert had completed his hotel and obtained his licence on the same day as Tasker – this was on 24th November, 1884.

Mr. Tasker's hotel was chosen by a large party of visitors in December, 1884, as the venue for an important luncheon. The *Sydney Morning Herald* reported on 22nd December, 1884:

In the afternoon a party sat down to dinner at Mr. Tasker's hotel, where a really excellent repast was provided at short notice in a manner which said much for the progress of civilization at Sunny Corner.

This party included the directors of the silver mine, members of parliament and government officials.

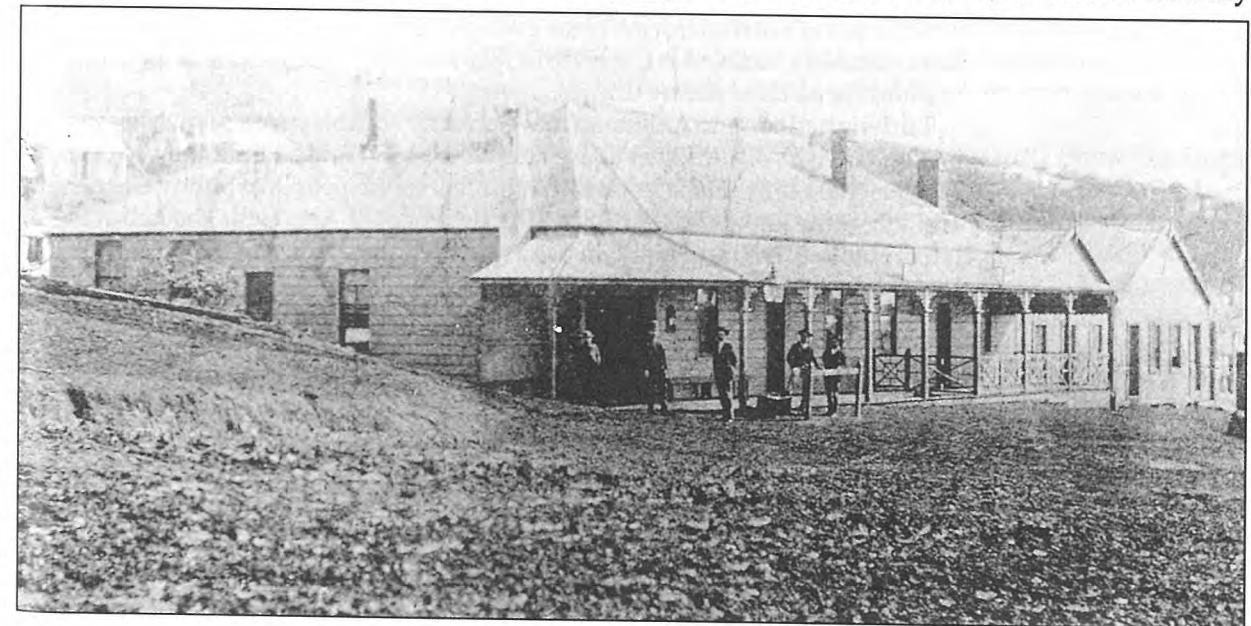
Before coming to Sunny Corner, Mr. Tasker had been a publican for fifteen years and had been running a hotel at Mandurama. It seems that he did not stay long at Sunny Corner – in just over a year the licence for the Royal Exchange Hotel was transferred to James Rooke, on 29th March, 1886. C.F. Cullen was the proprietor in 1887.

By 1892, Charles Murray had returned to Sunny Corner from Lewis Ponds, and he took over the licence for the Royal Exchange Hotel. Charles and his wife Mary continued to run this hotel until 1913-15. At that time there were only two hotels left in Sunny Corner, the Royal and the Royal Exchange, just opposite one another in the middle of the town. Business was very poor, but the Murray's did not feel inclined to leave Sunny Corner again – Charles was in his late sixties, and Mary in her late fifties. So they decided to close the Royal Exchange Hotel, and to move across to the Royal Hotel. The Royal remained open for another ten years.

The Royal Exchange Hotel had been the place where racing bets were settled. Sunny Corner once had a race course, and horse racing was a popular activity. The busiest time for the Royal Exchange Hotel was just after the Sunny Corner races had finished. After the bets were settled, Mr. Murray, who was president of the race club, provided free meals for everyone. The hotel had a huge dining room and the maids had to scrub the great tables and floors until they were gleaming white.

The hotel site today is just a vacant block of land, covered in tussocky

Royal Exchange Hotel, Sunny Corner, late 1880s. Photo courtesy Bruce McPhail, Lithgow







Royal Exchange Hotel can be seen in the background of this photo, which was taken just as the first man arrived in the bicycle race, 15th August 1908. Photo by George C. Fraser, courtesy Col Ferguson, Palmer's Oakley

grasses – there is no trace left to indicate the former years of bustling activity on that spot. The hotel still stood on the site in the 1920s, but it was later demolished and removed elsewhere, the present whereabouts of the building is not known.

#### *The Star Hotel, Sunny Corner (Weinert's)*

When Ludwig Adolphus Weinert applied for a conditional licence for a hotel at Sunny Corner, on 13th October, 1884, the application was for "proposed premises", so one must assume that the hotel building was not yet begun. The building may have been transported from elsewhere, as the Star Hotel was completed and opened by 24th November, 1884. In his licence application, Mr. Weinert stated that he had kept a store at Wallerawang, and was at present a storekeeper at Murrumburrah (near Young). Mr. Weinert's daughter said that he ran a bakery business at Capertee in 1880 and that a Mr. Roberts helped him to build the hotel at Sunny Corner.

Ludwig had come to Australia from Germany with his parents when he was just seven years old. As well as the Star Hotel, Mr. Weinert built the Victoria Hall just next door. He later donated this hall to the people of Sunny Corner and it became known as the Sunny Corner School of Arts Hall. The hall was later rebuilt in 1960 and is still in use as a community hall. But the hotel is no longer standing.

The Victoria Hall was built during May, 1885 and was described as "a substantial theatre or public hall immediately adjoining the hotel". In August, 1885, Ludwig's wife Mary died, aged just thirty-two years. They had five children.

Mr. Weinert appears to have run a successful establishment at Sunny Corner. His hotel supplies came from Cooper and Nathan in Sydney, and were sent up from Wallerawang by teamsters. Chinamen delivered vegetables from Bathurst. Weinert made his own German sausages and cured his own bacon. Any banquets held in the hall would be supplied from the kitchen of the Star Hotel. A well was dug to supply the hotel with fresh water, and there was a

wooden trough at the front of the hotel filled with water for visitors' horses.

As well as the hall and the hotel, Mr. Weinert owned three shops just opposite the hotel, and the football ground behind the shops where, apart from football matches, travelling circus performances would be held. The three shops were occupied by a bootmaker (his youngest son, also Ludwig Adolphus), Dr. Magill, and the third was used to store meat for the hotel.

The hall was used for many purposes. Mr. Lean showed his magic lantern slides at this venue, and many dances were held there too, with visitors arriving on horseback or in the mail coach travelling long distances from such places as Bathurst, Cullen Bullen, Portland, Wallerawang and Piper's Flat. These dances sometimes did not finish up until 5 a.m. in the morning. Later activities in the hall included roller skating and badminton. At one time the School of Arts Library was housed there, after having been moved there from the Oddfellows Hall, but this library closed during the 1920s, and the hall gradually fell into disrepair until it was rebuilt in 1960. In 1900 there was a huge fall of snow, with several feet deep lying on the ground. The roof of the hall caved in under the weight of the snow and had to be repaired. The verandah of the Star Hotel also collapsed, just seconds after Weinert had walked under it and into the hotel, after inspecting the damage at the hall!

Ludwig Weinert died in July, 1901, aged fifty-three years. He and his wife are buried at Kirkconnell cemetery. The hotel licence expired at the end of that year, and the Star Hotel then closed. Ludwig's son Alf, who had the bootmaking shop, moved his shop to Portland. The Star Hotel stood at Sunny Corner for a time, and was then dismantled and rebuilt again in Portland. It was eventually destroyed by fire.

#### *Criterion Hotel – Sunny Corner*

John Snape applied for a licence for his premises on 27th April, 1885, the licence was granted subject to the building being fenced. This was done, and the Criterion Hotel opened at Sunny Corner on May 1st, 1885. This hotel had ten rooms and was built at a cost of £900. It was situated just three doors down from Weinert's Star Hotel. John Snape had a wife and two children, and he was able to produce high testimonials as to his good character from the police and residents of Sunny Corner.

A correspondent from Sunny Corner wrote in the *Bathurst Times*: "As a sign of the times improving, Mr. Snape opened his new hotel the Criterion, to day. It is comfortably furnished throughout, and will no doubt receive a fair share of support."

The hotel was advertised in the *Sunny Corner Silver Press* in March 1886. It was stated: "John Snape provided Good Accommodation and Wines and Spirits of the Very Best Brands!"

But another advertisement in the same newspaper the following year seemed to indicate that the hotel had changed both name and ownership – 27th February, 1887 – "Commercial Hotel (late Snape's Criterion), Mr. R. Brennan proprietor". Mr. Brennan still had the hotel in 1888.

A memory map of Sunny Corner during the 1890s (drawn by Will Jeffree), shows "Snape's Hotel" on the site of the Criterion, so perhaps John Snape took over the hotel again during the 1890s. It is not known when this hotel closed but it had been demolished prior to 1910.



### *Silver Street Hotel – Sunny Corner*

Abraham Lane applied for a conditional licence for premises to be erected in Sunny Corner. This was in September, 1885. In his application to the Licensing Court, Lane stated:

The allotment on which I propose to build the public house has been applied for by me; I live on it; I have grown up sons; I have had to accommodate visitors owing to the lack of room in the existing inns; the building that has been already erected by me, at a cost of £150, will be occupied by myself and family.

Mr. Lane had been giving lodging for visitors for free, so great was the demand at Sunny Corner for accommodation. The Licensing Court asked that the full plans for the additional buildings connected with the hotel be submitted. Lane's licence was eventually granted and the Silver Street Hotel was built. It probably opened early in 1886.

The Silver Street Hotel was advertised in the *Sunny Corner Silver Press* in February, 1887, and the proprietor was then Abraham Lane. The licence for this hotel changed hands in July, 1888, when it passed from Abraham Lane to Cornelius Walsh. By 1890 Charles G. Roberts was the proprietor of the Silver Street Hotel.

But somehow, during the period from 1887 to 1890, the Silver Street Hotel and its owner, Abraham Lane, were spirited away to Lewis Ponds, or so it seems! While a hotel continued to be run at Sunny Corner, by the name of the Silver Street Hotel, Abraham Lane had transported a hotel from Sunny Corner to Lewis Ponds, and rebuilt it just across the road from Charles Murray's hotel at Lewis Ponds. Lane was definitely in Lewis Ponds during 1890, and may have moved there in 1888 when Murray moved there. Lane's Hotel at Lewis Ponds was called The Commercial Hotel – he later moved it again to Lucknow where it was renamed The Royal Hotel.

Probably another hotel was built on the site at Sunny Corner after Lane left. During 1895–6, Francis Brognorcolley held the licence. This hotel was marked on Will Jeffree's memory map (showing Sunny Corner during the 1890s) as "C. Robert's Hotel – Lane's earlier". The date of closure of this hotel is not known, and the building had been demolished before 1910. Charles Roberts, incidentally, had been the licensee of the Royal Hotel in 1886, before taking over the Silver Street Hotel.

### *Court House Hotel – Sunny Corner*

By the time Francis Havenhand applied for a conditional publican's licence in November, 1885, there were already five hotels in Sunny Corner, and the licensing magistrate would not grant Havenhand a licence unless he could produce evidence for the necessity of yet another hotel. Not to be beaten, Havenhand applied again, and produced two petitions from Sunny Corner in favour of the application. His proposed hotel was to provide a better class of accommodation than some of the other hotels – with so many travellers passing through Sunny Corner, the accommodation was much needed – the planned hotel would be no mere drinking shop! The licence was granted.

Frank Havenhand had previously run the Club House Hotel in Bathurst. Given that the conditional licence had been granted on 30th November, 1885,

and that the hotel still had to be built at Sunny Corner, it could be reasonably assumed that the Court House Hotel opened early in 1886.

Havenhand became a member of the Sunny Corner Band and was also a prominent citizen at Sunny Corner. He brought the first Edison phonograph to the town during the late 1890s, and it must have been quite a drawcard at his hotel.

The Court House Hotel was so called because it stood quite near the Sunny Corner court house – the hotel was just near the turn-off to Dark Corner, on the main Sunny Corner road. There was a tennis court at the hotel which was still being used in the 1920s. The hotel itself closed sometime after 1900, but the building was still standing for many years after it closed – it would have been demolished sometime between 1910 and 1920.

Frank Havenhand (he was known as Frank rather than Francis) returned to Bathurst where he became Mayor of that town in 1920. He died in office in the same year.

### *Club House Hotel, Sunny Corner*

In August, 1885, Charles R. Walker applied for a hotel licence at Sunny Corner. The licensing magistrate did not want to grant yet another licence for Sunny Corner as he considered that there were enough hotels in the town already.

But as the proposed hotel site was just outside the town boundary, it was classed as "a house on the road" rather than "a public house in the town". Walker stated that there was a great need for accommodation for the drovers, draymen and teamsters who passed by. Walker owned an acre of ground with plenty of water. The site was near the water reserve and a great number of teams already regularly camped around that area. Twenty or thirty teams passed the place every day, and the teamsters required a hotel near the water

Court House Hotel, F. Havenhand, late 1880s. Photo by Beavis Bros. & Co., Bathurst, courtesy Magill family, Bathurst



reserve. Already he was providing accommodation to those who could not find lodging elsewhere. The police had no objection to the application. Walker added that he had two sons and three daughters and was a respectable citizen. A public furnace was soon to be built near the site, which would mean even more people in the vicinity. The hotel site was not in the town, but on the road to Rydal. (The site was more or less opposite the present recreation ground). Walker's intended hotel would cost £1,400 to build, it would be very substantial – far above the average of bush hotels, he said. The licence was granted.

For some reason Walker did not proceed with his hotel, and twelve months later the conditional licence was transferred to Alfred Draper. Draper was described as a respectable man, and he planned to call his new hotel the Club House Hotel. The conditional licence was granted to Draper on 26th July, 1886.

Alfred Draper and his wife Sophia had been running the Muswellbrook Hotel before coming to Sunny Corner, and prior to that, Alf had been a stockman around Merriwa and Coolah, and Sophia had been a teacher. They had married in 1880 and already had two children by the time they arrived at Sunny Corner. When they opened the Club House Hotel at Sunny Corner, Alf would have been aged forty, and Sophia aged thirty-two.

The hotel was a success, and Alf was able to indulge in his hobby of training racehorses – he built stables near the hotel. Four more children were born to the Drapers, and Sophia was expecting her seventh child when tragedy struck the family. Alfred Draper was taking two of his racehorses out of the stables, when the horse he was riding, Garnet, tripped over a drain that had been dug to drain the stables. The horse fell and Alfred Draper died of the injuries he received, on 30th October, 1892. He was only forty-six years old and was then buried in the Meadow Flat cemetery, next to his little daughter Coralie who had died a few years earlier in 1889.

Sophia continued to run the hotel until after the birth of her child in July, 1893. She held the hotel licence until 1895-6, but it was probably during the year of 1895 that she sold the hotel. She loaded her possessions and her six children into the back of a coach and left Sunny Corner to travel to Angledool in far western New South Wales, where her bachelor brother ran a hotel. After a number of years, Sophia Draper bought a hotel at Pilliga which she ran for many years before moving to Coogee in Sydney, where she died at the age of eighty-five.

The Club House Hotel at Sunny Corner had been bought by Benjamin Thomas, who held the licence from 1896 until 1900 or later. The hotel had been demolished before 1910, and the site is now covered by a pine plantation.

#### *Tattersall's Hotel, Sunny Corner*

Tattersall's Hotel was built on a block of ground which was in the name of Michael F. Egan, and it stood between the Royal Hotel and Lean's Beehive Stores, more or less opposite the Silver Street Hotel. It may have been the last hotel built in Sunny Corner as it is not mentioned in any licensing records prior to 1888. Edward Carr was the proprietor in 1889, after moving there from the Royal Hotel. Edward Carr had earlier run a billiard saloon, from 1884, but had later dismantled that building and sent it to Lewis Ponds in about 1888. From 1892 until 1895, Michael F. Egan was the proprietor of Tattersall's Hotel, but then Edward Carr took over again from 1895 until 1900. During those years he

held a billiard licence as well as a publican's licence, and obviously the hotel had billiard tables. (One needed a proper licence to run billiard tables.) In 1900, John Murray held the licence. The hotel closed soon after this, and was demolished prior to 1910.

#### *Billiard Saloons*

In 1886 Sunny Corner had two billiard saloons. These were run by Edward Carr and Henry Payne. Three other men applied for a billiard licence but these were not granted – the applicants were George Hemsworth, John Woolmer, and a Mr. Gustavson.

In February and August of 1885, George Hemsworth tried in vain to obtain a billiard licence for a room he had built near the Sunny Corner mine. The objection was that it was situated too near the mining works, and too far away from police supervision. Discretion was needed in granting billiard licences, as these premises could be kept open an hour longer than the hotels. Although the mine manager, Mr. Hurley was in favour of the billiard saloon, the licence was never granted.

The fate of Carr's billiard saloon has been mentioned in the sections on Murray's Hotel and the Royal Hotel.

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## CHURCHES

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### *Introduction*

There were four churches in the town of Sunny Corner in the 1880s and 1890s, Wesleyan, Roman Catholic, Presbyterian and Church of England. The Salvation Army were also represented at one time. At West Mitchell was the Union Church, which catered for all Protestant religions. At Kirkconnell there was another Catholic church (still standing), and also there was a Wesleyan church and a Church of England at Meadow Flat. There appears to have been a church at Dark Corner too, prior to the 1870s, as school classes were being held in a church building there in 1877.

The miners, in those days, were a God-fearing lot, and the churches would have featured prominently in their lives. Just how prominently is clearly indicated by the mere fact of there being no less than nine or ten religious establishments between Kirkconnell and Meadow Flat.

At one time, the four Sunny Corner churches were all within a stone's throw of one another, Anglican and Catholic almost opposite one another in the main street, and the Presbyterian and Wesleyan a very short distance away in Silver Street.

But times have changed, and today there are no churches left in Sunny Corner. The population had dwindled after 1900, and the churches were all dismantled and removed elsewhere.

The opening dates of these churches are as follows: Meadow Flat Wesleyan Church, about 1857; Mitchell's Creek Union Church, early 1860s; Dark Corner, possibly 1860s; Kirkconnell Catholic Church, 1864; Sunny Corner Catholic Church, 1885; Sunny Corner Wesleyan Church, 1886; Sunny Corner Church of England, about 1886; Meadow Flat Church of England, 1886; Sunny Corner Presbyterian Church, 1886; Salvation Army, 1890.



### Wesleyan Church (Methodist)

The Wesleyan Church seems to have been by far the most popular in Sunny Corner, if one can judge by the numerous snippets of information in the *Bathurst Free Press and Mining Journal*, regarding the activities of this church. By comparison, the other churches scarcely rated a mention. As well as the regular Sunday sermons given by both lay preachers and ministers, there was also a well attended Sunday school, plus a constant round of other social activities. These included concerts, often featuring the local Band of Hope, choral services, Sunday School picnics, cake stalls, bun scrambles and special Christmas activities. The Wesleyan Church were very much against drink, with many sermons being preached on the evils of King Alcohol. Children at the Sunday School were asked to sign a written pledge, stating that they would never touch alcohol. With the eight hotels in Sunny Corner, the community must have been relatively sober.

The first Methodist service held in Sunny Corner was in February 1885, and conducted in a hall owned by Mr. Richard Lean. Mr. Lean, a lay preacher, had built and furnished this hall for the sole purpose of holding religious services in it. So successful were these services that after two months the hall had to be extended to 40 feet in length so as to accommodate the growing congregation. The hall was situated next door to Mr. Lean's Beehive Store, a large general store in the main street.

But the hall was still too small so it was decided to build a proper church. The Wesleyan church was first situated at the top of Silver Street. It could accommodate 400 people. It was 40 feet in length, 20 feet wide, the walls were 12 feet high, and the ceiling when lined was about 18 feet high. There were four Gothic windows on each side, and a porch seven feet by five feet with Gothic doors, at the front. The gables were finished with ornamental barge boards. The church was illuminated by two centre chandeliers and four bracket lamps on each side, and the seating consisted of twenty pews made of red deal. A new cabinet organ was purchased. The building contractor was Mr. R. Clarke, who also donated a cedar rostrum and pulpit. The total cost of the church was £263.

On Sunday 14th February, 1886, an opening service was held in the new church, although it was still unlined. The minister of the circuit was Rev. A. Hutchinson. A Sunday School (called The Sabbath School) was started soon after.

The first wedding in this church was between Alice Bedford and Thomas Longton, son of the Sunny Corner mine manager. The couple were married on 25th February, 1891, and were presented with a family Bible and hymn book by Richard Lean, who was the secretary of the trustees of the church. This Bible was passed to Mrs. Crook of Bulli, a daughter of the couple, now in her nineties, who lived in Lithgow for many years.

In January, 1897, the Wesleyan church was opened on a new site. The original church building in Silver Street was lifted from its foundations and carted to a new site in the main street, just a few doors down from the A.J.S. Bank. The church was also renovated and enlarged, at a cost of £135. A report on 6th January, 1897 in the *Bathurst Free Press and Mining Journal* stated:

The site of the enlarged church is in Bathurst Street, in a most central and convenient position. The enlargement consists of two wings, which give additional seating accommodation for about 60 or 70 adults. The interior

has been tastefully painted and decorated, and a new system of lighting has been introduced.

The contractors were Frank Cook and G. Shumack.

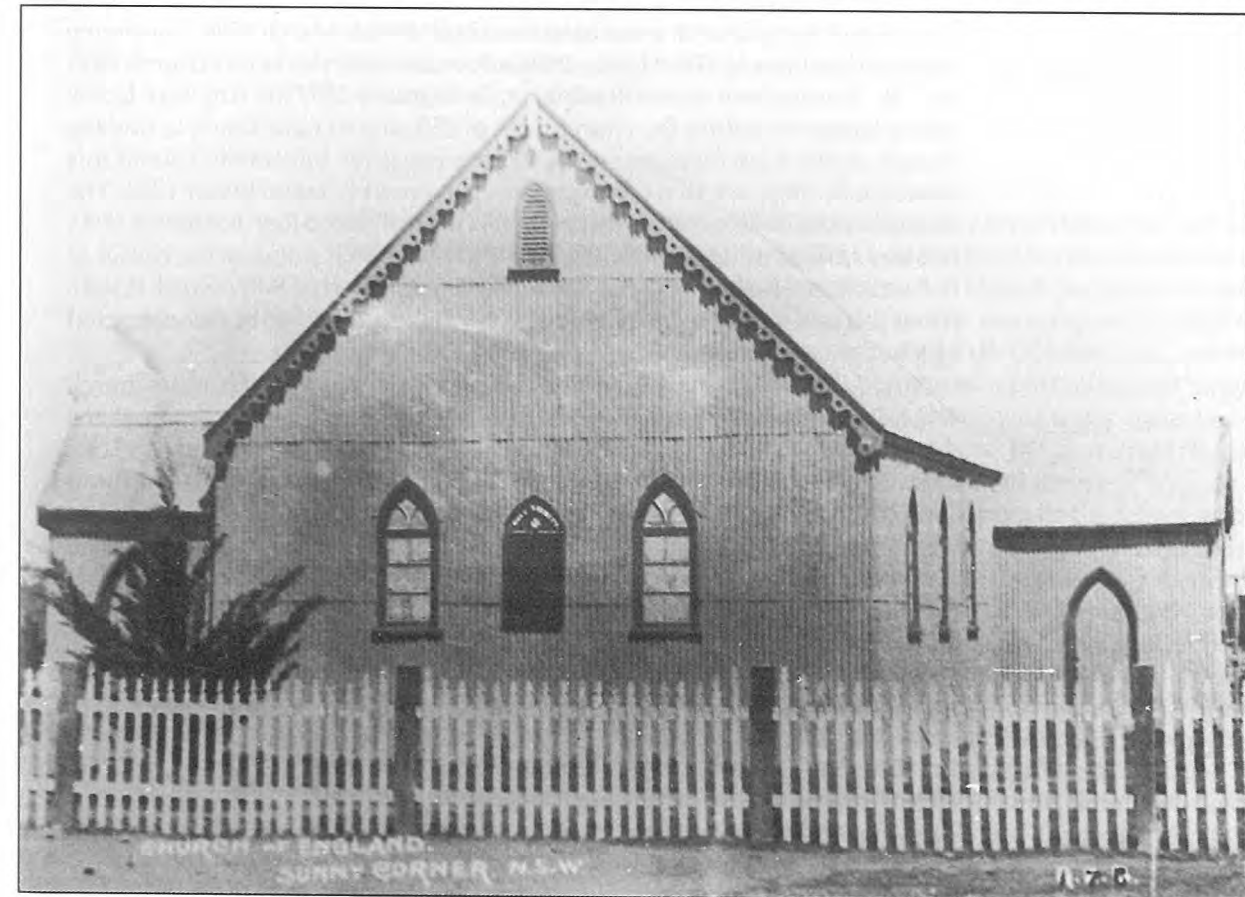
It seems rather surprising that the church was enlarged and renovated at a time when the Sunny Corner silver mine was failing. Perhaps the congregation had faith that the mine would re-open on a large scale, and the miners would once again be employed.

But the declining population did indeed close this church. The exact date of closure is not known. The last resident minister left Sunny Corner in 1904, but services were still held by visiting ministers for several years after that. It has not yet been ascertained what happened to the church building, most likely it was dismantled and rebuilt somewhere else. It is not known if the church was built of weatherboard or corrugated iron, as no photographs of this church have yet come to light.

A Wesleyan church was also built at Meadow Flat, in about 1857, then "a pretty, new church" was built on the block next to the original church, in December 1896. It was built of corrugated iron, and opened by Rev. Harold Wheen. This church is still standing today.

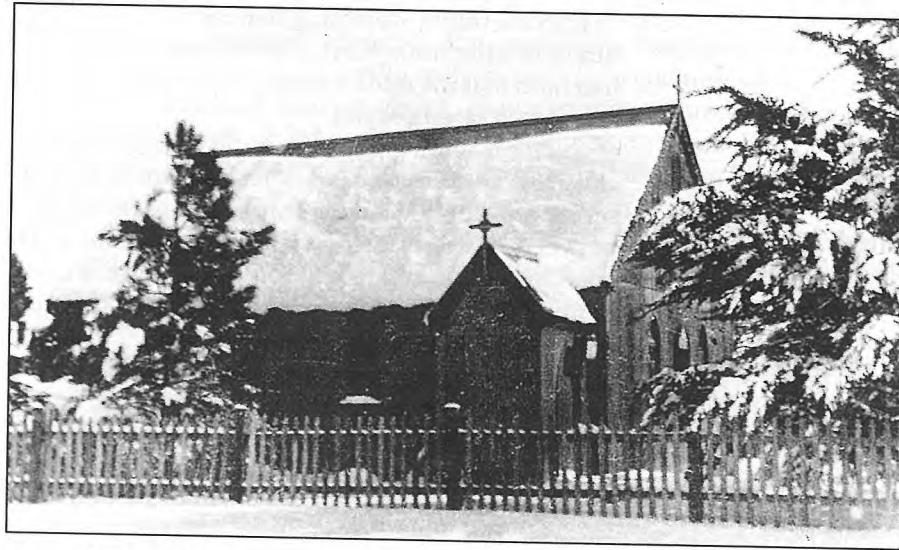
Various Wesleyan ministers stationed at Sunny Corner were: Rev. J.W. Brown, 1886; Rev. Ernest Ensor, 1890; Rev. William J. Stephens, 1891; Rev. Joseph Walker, 1892-3; Rev. George H. Barnett, 1894; Rev. Harold Wheen,

The Holy Trinity Church of England, Sunny Corner, about 1908. Photo courtesy T. Parmenter, Sydney





1895-97; Rev. John Thomas, 1898-1900; Rev. James B. Penman, 1902-3; Mr. R. Lean was superintendent of the Sunday School in 1890, and Mr. J.W. Laury in 1896.



*Church of England*

The Holy Trinity Church must have been built before March 1886. The *Sunny Corner Silver Press* of 27th March, 1886, advertises a service at this church with Rev. W. Everingham as circuit minister. In February 1887 the Anglican ladies held a bazaar to reduce the church debt of £50, and to raise funds to line the church. Apart from these mentions, there is very little information about this church, but there are two photographs of it, possibly taken about 1908. The church was built of corrugated iron. Rev. Wilson replaced Rev. Bartlett in 1890, but there are no other records of ministers. The church stood on the corner of Bathurst Street (main road) and Orient Street (now part of Bob's Creek Road). It was dismantled about 1933, and taken to Palmer's Oakey to be reconstructed as a house on a property now owned by Colin Ferguson.

Mrs. Linda Smith remembers attending services at Holy Trinity Church when she was a girl. Her mother, Mrs. Harriet Kearns, played the organ, so the whole family would attend both Sunday services, one in the morning and one in the evening. This would have been in the years from before 1910 to around 1920. The two Sunday services provided a social outlet for Linda and her sister who lived several kilometres out of town. Col Wilkinson remembers the Kearns family driving past in their horse and buggy on Sundays, the two girls dressed up in their Sunday best and wearing fancy blue bonnets. Col was just a small boy then.

At Meadow Flat, there is also a Church of England. It was built about 1886 and constructed of brick. Although still standing, this building is no longer used as a church.

#### *Presbyterian Church*

The Presbyterian Church was also referred to as the Scotch Church. Most people of Scottish descent in those days were Presbyterian. The church was

opened at Sunny Corner on 28th July, 1886 and an inscribed foundation stone was laid by Mr. John Dobbie J.P. of Meadow Flat. The church was still operational in 1897, when Rev. McCook was the local minister. He was very popular, but only stayed six months before continuing his studies at St. Andrew's Theological College.

Just when the church closed is not known, but it was removed to Portland before 1915. The church was probably built of weatherboard, and while in Portland it burned down. A new church was then rebuilt in Portland on the same site (of brick), and reopened in 1915. But a link with Sunny Corner has been retained, as the original inscribed foundation stone from the Sunny Corner church was incorporated into the inside west wall of the new Portland church. It reads: "Memorial Stone laid by John Dobbie Esq., J.P., July 21, 1886". There are no known photographs of the Sunny Corner Presbyterian Church.

In Sunny Corner, the church was situated in Silver Street, just up from the Catholic church. Mrs. Linda Smith, who attended the Church of England up till about 1920, doesn't remember the Presbyterian church, so it is likely that the church was taken to Portland soon after 1900. (Mrs. Smith was born about 1904.)

#### *Salvation Army*

In April 1890 the Salvation Army began to hold meetings at Sunny Corner. These meetings competed with evening school classes being held by Mr. McPhail the school teacher. The evening school was forced to close, while the Salvation Army meetings were most popular, their brass band would have attracted many of the miners.

#### *Union Church, West Mitchell*

The Union church catered for all Protestant religions. Trevor Parmenter, in his booklet on the history of Sunny Corner (1961), claims that the church was built in 1897, but his source of information is unknown. A church certainly existed at Mitchell's Creek in 1884. A description of the tiny township of Mitchell's Creek appeared in the *Town and Country Journal* of 11th October, 1884, and it mentions that there was a church, a school, two stores, a post office and three or four houses. By this time of course, Mitchell's Creek was well past its heyday as a gold mining town, and it could be assumed that the church was built originally in the 1860s during the time of peak settlement there.

A map of Mitchell's Creek of 1885 shows a church opposite the school, and this was the site of the church which in later years was always referred to as the Union church. Richard Lean, in his memoirs of Sunny Corner (article, *Lithgow Mercury*, 1st April, 1937), remembered that the Union church was situated opposite the West Mitchell School, and that the two institutions shared the use of the one bell. This bell had been originally donated to the church by Mr. P.N. Russell who was a leading foundry proprietor. He was visiting Mitchell's Creek to supervise the installation of the batteries used for quartz crushing. Mr. Donald Campbell, a prominent gold miner at Mitchell's Creek in the 1860s and 1870s, hinted to Mr. Russell that he should make a donation to the church, so Mr. Russell presented the bell. It was erected for safety's sake at the public school across the road. This was no disadvantage,

said Mr. Lean, for it was tolled on week days to summon the pupils, and on the Sabbath its peals filled the valley as it called the worshippers to the church. When the West Mitchell School closed in 1886, the bell was placed on a post in the church grounds.

The original Mitchell's Creek church may have been rebuilt at one time, but it would have occupied roughly the same site. The church bell was in the possession of Bert Lean for many years and was then given to the Martin family of Dark Corner.

Services were still being held in the Union church in 1937. Mr. Richard Lean at one time was the organist at that church, and Mrs. Lillian Stilwell played the organ there prior to 1920. When the church bought a new organ, the old one was given to Mrs. Stilwell. It was a French harmonium, possibly built around 1870. The information about the organ is contained in a letter that Mrs. Stilwell wrote to Trevor Parmenter in 1961, when Mrs. Stilwell lived at Kurnell.

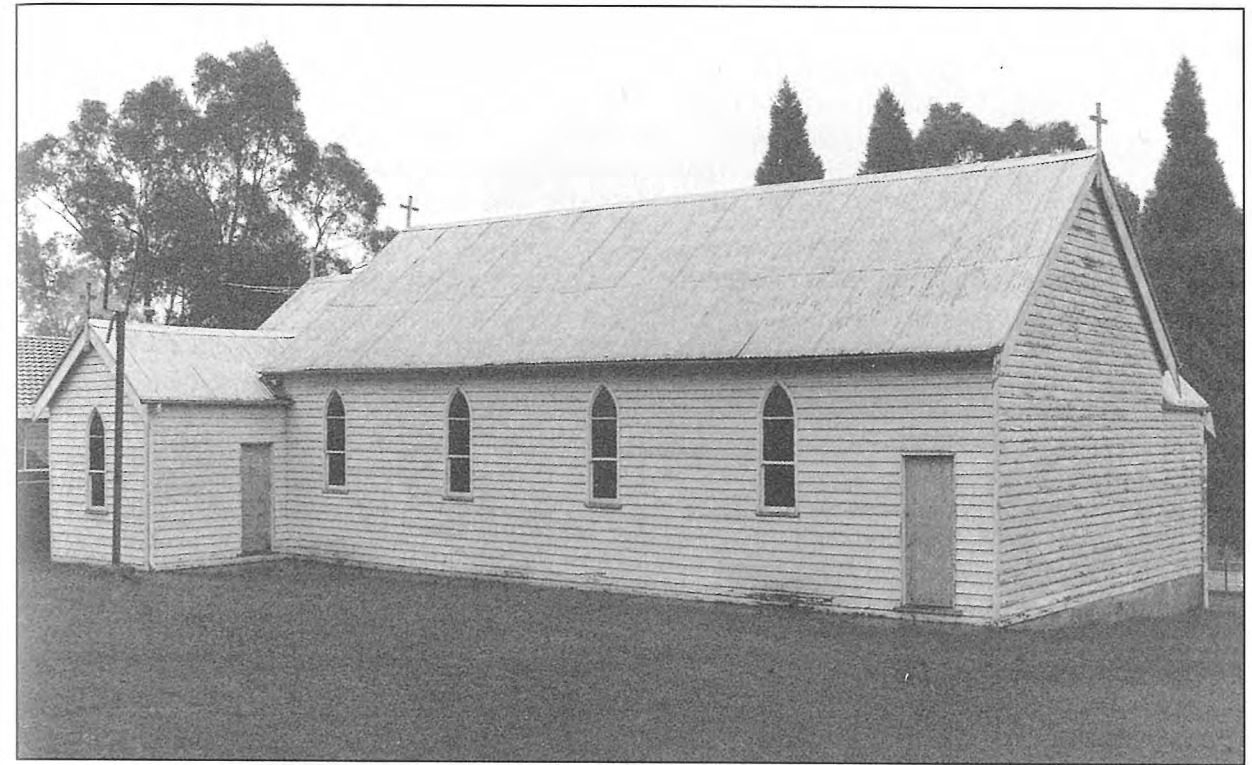
The Union church was pulled down late 1940s or early 1950s. Mrs. Bulkeley of Cullen Bullen remembers that there was a working bee to pull down the church, roughly forty or so years ago.

It has not been ascertained what became of the church. It seems that it did not go to Cullen Bullen. (There were three churches at Cullen Bullen. The Roman Catholic church there came from Sunny Corner and is still standing; St. Aiden's Church of England was built at Cullen Bullen and demolished about 1987; and a Methodist church was also built locally, and demolished

West Mitchell Union Church, 1930s. Photo courtesy Fitzgerald family, Portland and Bathurst



about 1985.) Neither is there any evidence that the Union church went to Portland.



St. Brendan's Catholic Church, Cullen Bullen, 1989. This church once stood at Sunny Corner and was moved to Cullen Bullen in about 1940.

#### *Catholic Church and Convent*

In the 1880s, Mass was celebrated in the house of Mrs. MacCartney, Dark Corner, by Rev. J. Kelly from Oberon. Sunny Corner then belonged to what was known as the Fish River District, now the Parish of Oberon.

In June, 1885, a newspaper report stated: "There is a Roman Catholic Church, of wood, measuring some 40 feet by 25 feet in which divine service is regularly conducted by Father Walsh, who comes over from Oberon."

This church had been opened on the 8th March, 1885. Various priests visited from Oberon until 1891. They were Rev. Mathias P. Walsh, Fr. John O'Dowd, Fr. P.R. Davoren, Fr. Stanislaus H. McGee and Fr. Thomas Doran. By 1891 Sunny Corner was attached to the newly formed Parish of Kelso with Rev. E.J. Flanagan in charge. He remained at Sunny Corner until 1905. As he was then a young and very zealous priest, he attended to the spiritual needs of the Catholics of Sunny Corner with unfailing regularity. He was deeply attached to his congregation there and was specially proud of his fine choir. Fr. Flanagan was followed by Fr. Michael Heath, Fr. Arthur O'Brien and Fr. Patrick Casey. They all celebrated Mass in Sunny Corner at regular intervals from Portland.

Visiting priests would spend the night at Sunny Corner, in an annexe of the church. Consequently the Sunny Corner church was one of the few churches in Australia which had a chimney. Given the climate here, it was a real necessity.

The first Catholic marriage in Sunny Corner was on 13th July, 1891, between



Aiden Shumack and Mary Lydia Grabham. Fr. Doran was the officiating priest and witnesses were Richard Shumack and Mary Ann Shumack.

The Roman Catholic church at Sunny Corner seems to have been very popular in its day, but by the end of the 1920s the congregation had faded away, and in about 1940, the church building, in a bad state of repair, was removed to Cullen Bullen. After reconstruction, the church took on a new lease of life as St. Brendan's Catholic Church. The church is still standing today (1989) but appears to be in a poor state of repair. It is the only church still in use at Cullen Bullen. (Both Methodist and Anglican churches were recently demolished.)



#### *Sunny Corner Convent School*

In June, 1885, it was reported that there was a Catholic school at Sunny Corner, with sixty pupils, in the charge of Miss O'Donnell.

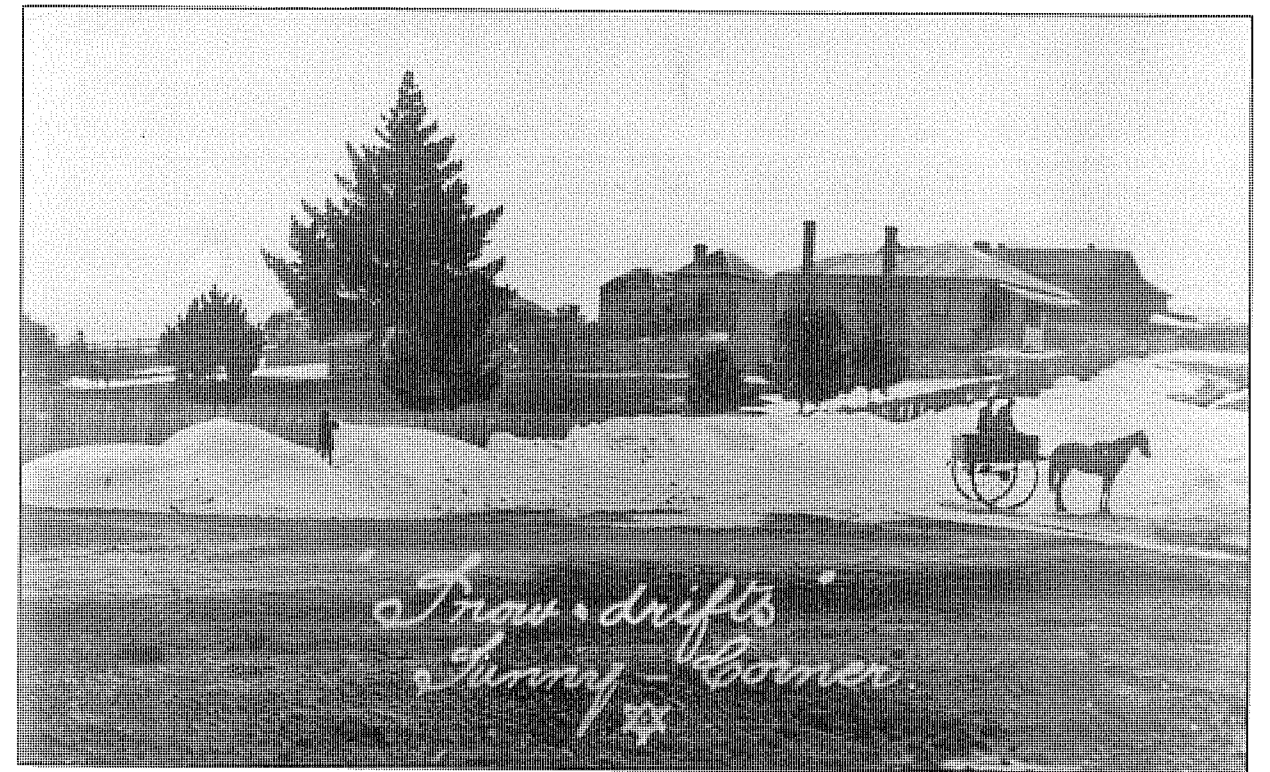
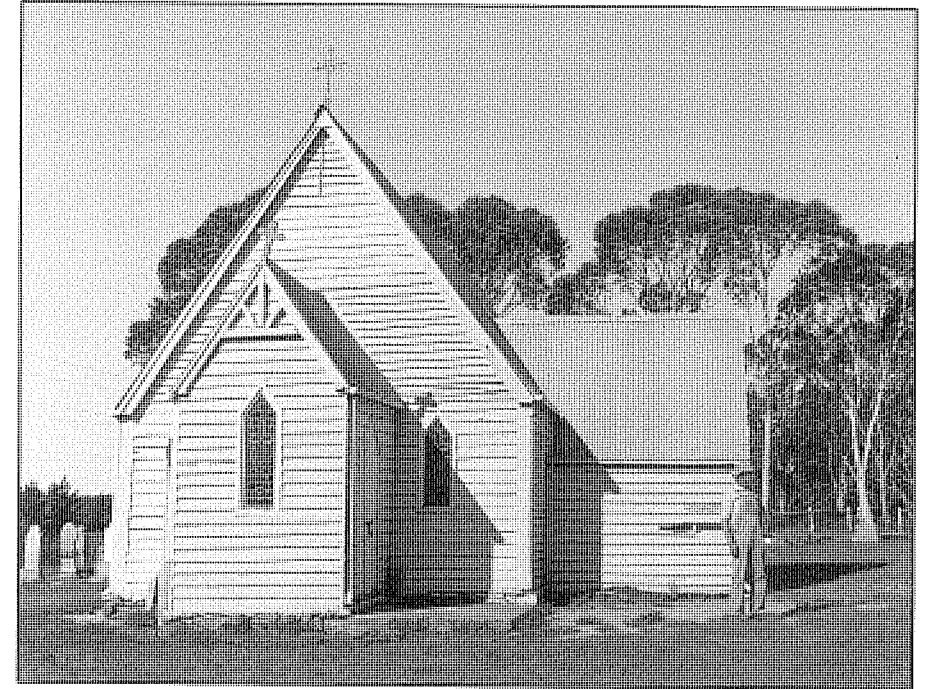
But as from January, 1888, the Catholic school was being run by the Sisters of St. Joseph from Perthville, who had opened their convent at Sunny Corner. There were usually five sisters attached to the school, but no lay teachers. Some of the sisters who were stationed there at various times were: Sisters Pius, Anthony, Winefride, Imelda, James, John, Reginald and Benedicta.

The first convent was a small cottage on the hill about a quarter of a mile from the church. The school was a corrugated iron hall quite close to the church. Later, the hall was divided, part being used as the school and part as a dwelling for the sisters.

In 1891 the school had 119 pupils. In comparison, the Sunny Corner Public School had about 250 pupils at that time. By 1905 the Convent School had only thirty-four pupils, while the public school had about 100. Numbers continued to decrease, and the sisters left Sunny Corner in 1909.

At right: Kirkconnell Catholic Church, 1989. Many Sunny Corner pioneers are buried in the churchyard.

Below: Snowdrifts at Sunny Corner, showing the police station and school, 1909. Photo by George C. Fraser, courtesy Mrs Linda Smith, Bathurst



#### *Kirkconnell Catholic Church*

St. Mary's Catholic Church, Kirkconnell, was built in 1864. In the cemetery next to this church are buried many of the early settlers from Sunny Corner. The church was renovated in 1901, and again, extensive rebuilding was done



in 1956. The building is of weatherboard construction, typical of the buildings of the era in this district. Services at this church are very infrequent, but the church and grounds are being well maintained.



Another view of the Sunny Corner police station, under snow. Photo by George C. Fraser, courtesy Frank Storey, Woy Woy

### POLICE STATION AND COURT HOUSE

There was a police station at Mitchell's Creek as early as 1863, but it is uncertain when this was actually opened, or when it closed.

In Sunny Corner in 1884, just after the town was begun, another police station was built, with Sergeant Wright being the constable-in-charge.

The following account from a newspaper cutting of June 1885, describes the police buildings at Sunny Corner:

It is also in contemplation to memorialize the Government, to build a brick or stone courthouse in the centre of town. The courthouse is at present held in the police barracks, which together with the constables' quarters have recently been erected. These buildings, however, have been put up in a hasty manner, having been built of green wood, which has since shrunk so much as to leave large fissures between the weatherboards, roof and flooring; so that the constables' quarters and the prisoners' cells are literally unfit for habitation. The stables have been much better constructed than the house and police cells, and are much more comfortable than any other portion of the buildings. The horses are better provided for than the men. In the absence of the constables, I visited the premises with a gentleman who informed me that they were literally uninhabitable in windy or cold weather, and urgently require lining with light Oregon pine throughout. The police district of Mitchell embraces an area of 20 miles, and includes the parishes of Yetholme, Kirkconnell, Dark Corner and Tarana. Senior Constable

Wright, a most zealous and efficient officer, is in charge, and is assisted by one trooper and one ordinary constable. He is also acting warden, mining registrar, and assistant C.P.S. He is also in charge of the silver escort which leaves Sunny Corner once a week, and which duty will shortly have to be sent away twice a week, owing to the rapid development of the silver smelting industry in the district.

It is not really clear if the buildings referred to above were left standing, or rebuilt. Certainly it seems that the "brick or stone courthouse in the centre of town" was never built, and it seems most probable that the other buildings mentioned were renovated and kept in use.

The police station and court house and other police buildings were situated next to the Sunny Corner Public School. Those known to have served in the police force at Sunny Corner are as follows:

Sergeant Wright, Constable Cromelin, Constable Jim Price, Constable Boon, Constable A.R. Small, Constable John Moore Sheridan, Constable L.A. O'Brien, Constable McConvid and Sergeant Dolman.

The police station closed in 1925, and the buildings were then sold and removed.

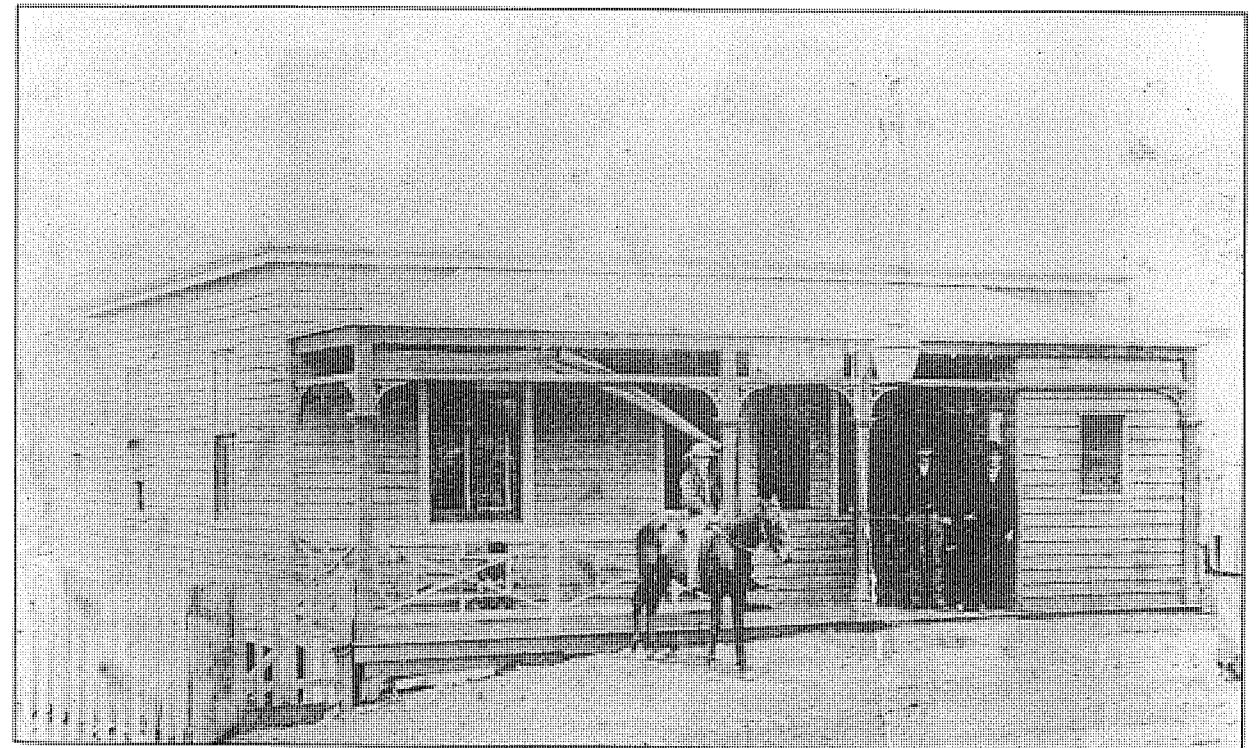
### POST OFFICES

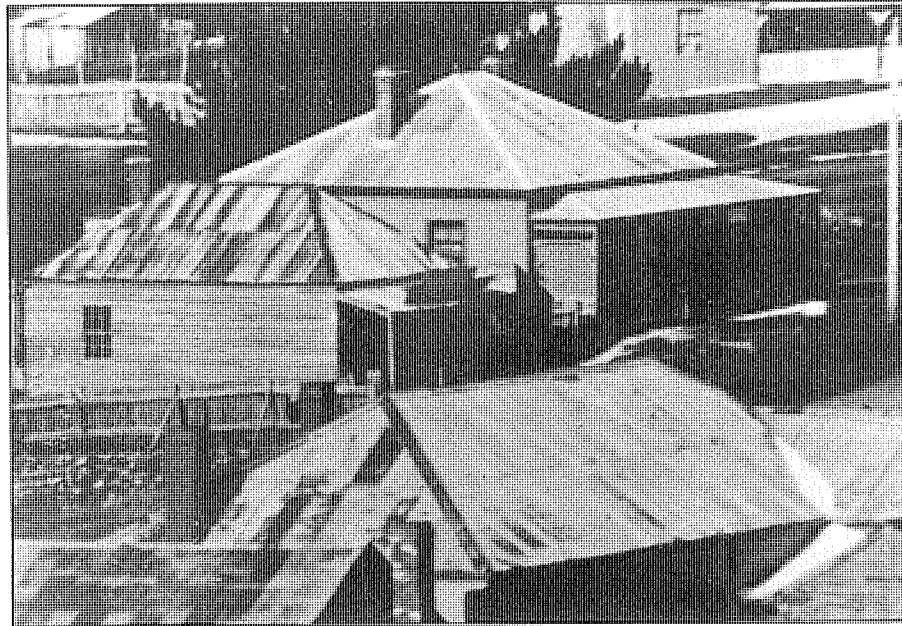
#### Introduction

A post office had been opened at Meadow Flat in March 1857, catering to the needs of a largely rural district.

The earliest settlement in the Sunny Corner area was at Mitchell's Creek,

Sunny Corner post and telegraph office, late 1880s. Photo courtesy Bruce McPhail, Lithgow





Sunny Corner post office, 1921. (Enlargement of photo on page 84)

where gold had been discovered in the 1850s. So it was here that a post office was opened on 1st January, 1862, to provide a service for perhaps 700 to 2000 gold miners. The "gold rush" at Mitchell's Creek lasted about eight years, then the population drifted away, but the post office remained open until about 1919.

There was also a post office at Dark Corner, which opened on 15th September, 1872. About 150 residents lived at Dark Corner then, generally farmers and gold miners. By 1874 many of the miners had moved away, and only twelve letters a week were being posted at Dark Corner, so the post office closed again. In June 1898 the post office reopened at Dark Corner, and this was to provide a continuous service to the local residents until 1973 when it again closed.



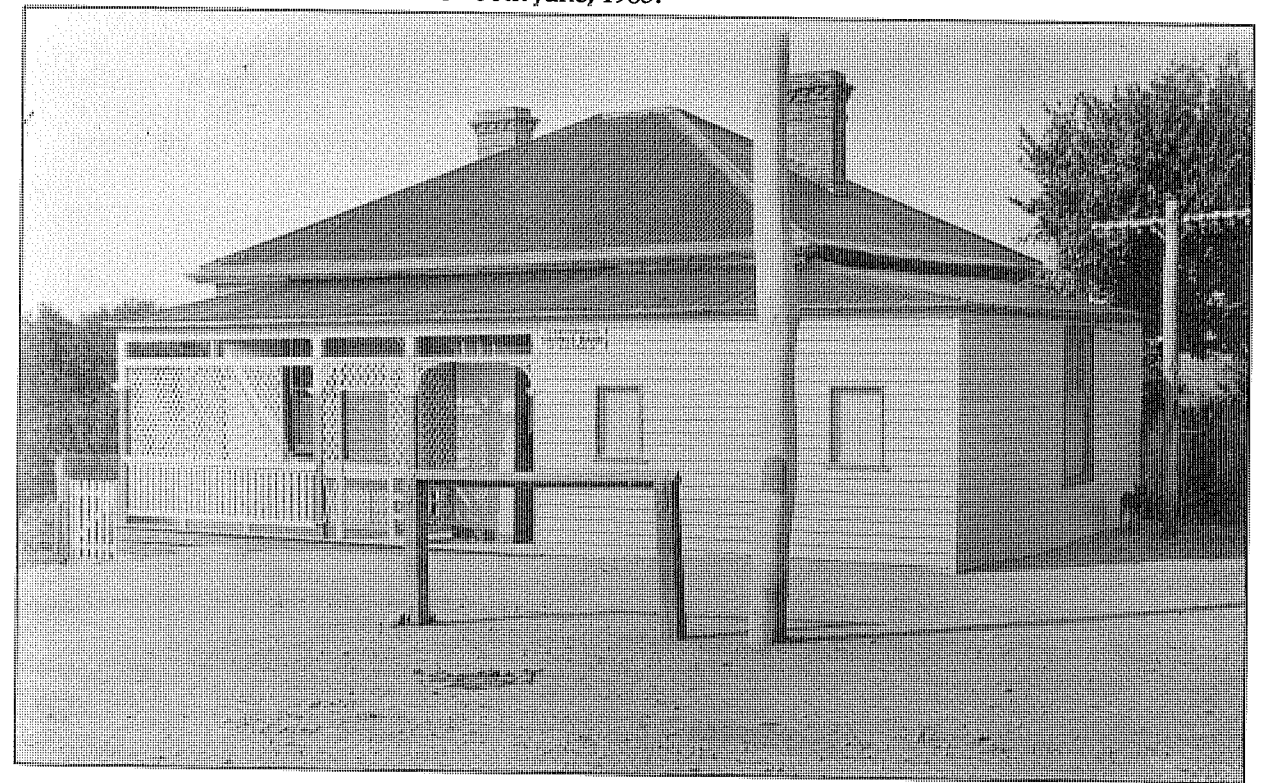
Sunny Corner post office, 1940s. Photo courtesy Magill family, Bathurst

Gold miners were working around Sunny Corner prior to 1884, but there was no township here until silver was discovered and the Sunny Corner Silver Mining Company was formed in 1884. As the mine went ahead with great optimism, so did the township. There was a huge population increase, the newcomers at first living in tents until they could afford to build homes. Shops and hotels were built, and by the end of 1885 the population was about 4,000.

A post office opened at Mitchell, as the new town had been called, on 1st January 1885, and at the same time, the name of the Mitchell's Creek post office was changed to West Mitchell.

But the locals at Sunny Corner had always referred to their settlement as Sunny Corner, not Mitchell, so they applied to have the name of Mitchell changed back to Sunny Corner. The town was officially gazetted as Sunny Corner on 3rd September, 1887, and the name of the post office was also changed back from Mitchell to Sunny Corner as from 16th August 1888.

After 100 years of continuous service, the Sunny Corner post office finally closed on 30th June, 1985.



Sunny Corner post office, February 1937. Photo courtesy Magill family, Bathurst

### Mitchell's Creek Post Office

Mitchell's Creek post office was opened on 1st January, 1862. The first postmaster was Donald Paterson. He was followed in May 1862 by George Hodgson, and in December 1869 by Samuel Shumack, who was also the mining registrar for the area. Samuel Shumack died in March 1884, so the post office was taken over by John Shumack. By February 1889, Colin McLachlan was postmaster, then John Hurst in November 1900, Mrs. Charlotte M. Odgers in June 1902, and Arthur J. Attuell in September 1913. Arthur Attuell died in 1919, aged only forty-nine years. His wife had died several years previously,



and this left his six children orphaned, the youngest being aged only five years old. His eldest daughter Elsie was to become the postmistress at Sunny Corner in April 1923, as was another daughter, Rita, in 1940. When Arthur Attuell died, the post office at West Mitchell closed. The name of Mitchell's Creek post office had been changed to West Mitchell on 1st January, 1885.

### *Sunny Corner Post Office*

The new settlement at Sunny Corner in 1884 was about two kilometres from the Mitchell's Creek post office. The residents petitioned the government to have a post office opened at Sunny Corner, where it would be closer to the new silver mine and its township. The population by the end of 1884 was 1,500.

The government agreed that a post office was necessary at Sunny Corner, and also a telegraph line on which messages could be sent by Morse code. The first postmaster was Richard H. Bulkeley, a local storekeeper, who was considered suitable for the job as he could operate the Morse telegraph system.

So the Sunny Corner post office first opened in a section of Bulkeley's Store on 1st January, 1885, and the telegraph line was connected by May, 1885. Mr. Bulkeley was in charge of sending and receiving all the messages of the townsfolk by the Morse code system. Many locals did not like the idea of Mr. Bulkeley knowing all their business and they complained to the postal department.

The mail coach snowbound at Sunny Corner, 24th June 1908. This photo was taken near the court house (police station). Photo courtesy T. Parmenter, Sydney



Mr. L.A. Tomkinson, a discreet officer from the Postmaster-General's Department, was then appointed to take charge, as from 1st September, 1885.

By 30th January, 1886, the post and telegraph office moved to new premises, where it was to remain for the next eighty-four years. These premises were more or less across the road from Bulkeley's Store, and consisted of a large timber building, built by and now rented from Hudson Bros. After renting these premises for several years, the P.M.G. Department finally purchased the building from Hudson's in 1890, at a cost of £250. The crown land on which the building was situated was transferred to the P.M.G. Department also.

This post office building had formerly been part of Hudson Bros.' business premises at Sunny Corner, and then had been in use for a short time as the Working Men's Club, with a library, billiard rooms and so on. In March 1886 the local men were lamenting the fact that they did not have a club to go to any more. But at least the town had its own post office.

The P.M.G. Department had considered buying a block of land and building their own premises. In September 1886 the Department of Lands sold off some blocks in Sunny Corner, but at from £12 to £30 each they were considered too dear, so Hudson's premises continued to be rented.

Increasing business meant the appointment of more staff. Mr. Tomkinson was still the postmaster, his wife became an assistant in 1887. Earlier on, W.F. Keating was appointed as a postal assistant, and there were also two messengers. Charles Aylin joined the staff in March 1886, and was the town's postman.

The name of the post office was changed from Mitchell to Sunny Corner in August 1888. The name of the town had been changed from Mitchell to Sunny Corner in September 1887, and there had been some confusion due to the post office carrying a different name to that of the official name of the township.

The population of Sunny Corner had reached a high of about 4,000 or even 5,000 people during 1885, but by 1896, due to the failure of the mine, the population had decreased so much that the post office staff was reduced to just Mr. Tomkinson, his wife, and a postman (C.T. Greenwell).

In 1904 the postman's position was discontinued and people had to collect their own mail from the post office. Many houses were being pulled down and sold for scrap timber. Only three hotels were left out of eight, and the hotel keepers had to combine other businesses with their hotels in order to make a living.

By 1908 Sunny Corner consisted only of two large and one small store, one butcher, one baker and two hotels. Mail was exchanged with Rydal six times a week, Yetholme six times and Dark Corner twice a week. Sunny Corner then became a semi-official office, and A.W. Fletcher became postmaster from 9th February, 1910.

In 1914, the status of the Sunny Corner post office was further reduced, and Miss M.N. Llewellyn who kept a dressmaking business, took over. At the same time the Morse telegraph system was removed and a telephone line was connected instead. This was part of the Wallerawang-Portland trunk line.

After Miss Llewellyn was transferred to Roseville, Miss Lily Nichols, daughter of the Dark Corner schoolteacher, took charge of the office on 28th November 1916.

From then up until 1923, the office was variously run by Mrs. Slattery, Mr. W. Buckfield and Mrs. Lawler.

Miss Elsie Attuell took over on 19th April 1923, and stayed on until 1940.



Then her sister, Miss Rita Attuell, became postmistress for the next twenty-one years, until she died in December 1961.

Mrs. Marie Elms then took over the job. She had previously worked at Yetholme post office, and had already done some part time work at Sunny Corner post office. The Elms family moved to Sunny Corner and lived in the post office residence, with Mrs. Elms in charge of sorting local mail and operating the town's switchboard. The post office building, by now quite an historic building, unfortunately burned down on 19th November, 1970. The old weatherboard building burned fiercely and the Elms family lost all their possessions. The steel safe in the post office was the only item which survived the fire.

The post office business had been combined with a small general store and petrol outlet. The local people of Sunny Corner formed a volunteer group, and a new post office and residence was built for the Elms family. Mrs. Elms continued to run the post office store for another fifteen years, although the connection of the S.T.D. telephone system during the 1970s meant a further reduction of status for the post office, which finally closed, after 100 years of continuous service, on June 30th, 1985.

#### *Dark Corner Post Office*

A post office first opened at Dark Corner on 15th September 1872. Daniel Cameron, the local storekeeper was postmaster. The nearest post office to Dark Corner was at Mitchell's Creek, a distance of five kilometres, an inconvenient distance as far as the 150 residents of Dark Corner were concerned. Daniel Cameron left the area after six months and Thomas Lawler, an innkeeper, became the postmaster. After about one year he resigned, and considered that the post office should be closed as the population had decreased to the point where only twelve letters a week were being posted.

Before the post office closed in March 1874, an application was made by



1927 – The mail car again in trouble! This Oldsmobile overturned near "Snowline" gate, Sunny Corner. (The mail then ran from Rydal to Yetholme.) Photo courtesy Wilkinson family, Sunny Corner

Thomas Shipley, storekeeper, for the position of postmaster. His application was supported by Daniel Campbell, George Dawson, John Ross, Abraham Grabham, I.V. Loth, and Thomas Smith, who were householders and inhabitants of Dark Corner. But their application was rejected.

A population increase led to the reopening of the Dark Corner post office on 16th July, 1898, with Mr. Aiden Shumack appointed postmaster. A mail service ran to Dark Corner and Palmer's Oakey twice a week.

In March 1921 Aiden Shumack resigned. His brother, Richard J. Shumack, took over the position, with his daughter Vera as assistant, but they did not stay long. In November 1921, George Shumack took over. He was succeeded by Thomas George Scott, a grazier, in February 1924.

Mr. Scott resigned in 1947 and his daughter-in-law Mrs. Louise Scott took over the position. By this time Dark Corner post office facilities included postal notes, a telephone exchange (with three telephone subscribers), and a telegram service.

Mrs. Scott resigned in December 1949, and the position was filled by Mrs. Emmaline Martin until 1973, when the Dark Corner post office finally closed.

#### SCHOOLS

##### *Mitchell's Creek and Sunny Corner*

A public school was opened at Mitchell's Creek in March 1864, with sixty-three pupils enrolled by the end of that year. The nearest school at that time was at Meadow Flat, and it had been opened in 1856. The population at Mitchell's Creek consisted largely of gold miners, possibly 700 to 2000 of them, although these numbers were reduced to about 300 by 1866. At the settlement of Mitchell's Creek at that time, there was also a post office, a church, two hotels and at least two stores.

The school at Mitchell's Creek was on a block of about half an acre. The schoolroom and teacher's residence were at first combined as one building, all under the one roof. The teacher and his family lived in three rooms which were built along one side of the school room. The kitchen had an earth floor, the rooms were unlined, hot in summer and cold and draughty in the winter.

The number of pupils remained fairly constant until 1884 when there was a large increase, due to the opening of the Sunny Corner silver mine. It was decided then to transfer the school to Sunny Corner which was two kilometres from Mitchell's Creek. A new school was built at Sunny Corner and opened early in 1886, and the school at Mitchell's Creek then closed.

The first record of a teacher at Mitchell's Creek school is that of Edward A. Peacock, who is listed in the N.S.W. Gazetteer for 1872 as a teacher living at Mitchell's Creek.

By September 1874, William Medcalf had been appointed as teacher. He was married and had a large family, although his constitution was described as delicate.

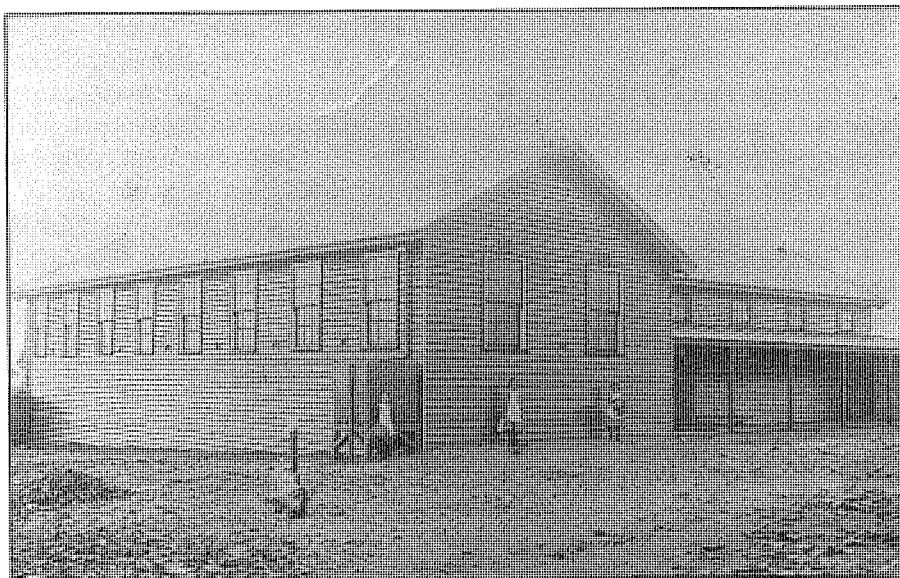
The schoolteacher's residence must have been very cramped, and freezing cold in winter, as the sawn wooden walls of the building had shrunk and warped. Exposure to bitter westerly winds was complained of, as was the heat of the summer afternoon sun.

A new teacher's residence was planned at Mitchell's Creek in 1876, and a



Above: Sunny Corner Public School, view from behind the school, 1921. Empire Brand postcard. Photo courtesy Don Stait, Sydney

At right: Sunny Corner Public School, c1900 Photo by G.B.D. Kitch & Co., Eclipse Photo Co., Sunny Corner, courtesy Ryan family, Sunny Corner



four-roomed weatherboard cottage, rooms 12 feet by 10 feet, with a detached kitchen 10 feet by 10 feet, was to be provided. The school itself was to be renovated and extended to include the original residence, the whole building measured some 40 feet by 30 feet.

Department of Education records state that they have no evidence to indicate that these works were ever carried out. However, two maps of Mitchell's Creek dated 1885 and 1887 clearly indicate a separate school residence, next door to the school building. A building is still standing on that site today which fits the architects plans, and its original construction method

would date back to 1876. It is constructed of weatherboard, internal walls being of mud-plaster and lath, with brick chimneys. Although now renovated inside, the house still has the original pressed metal ceilings. The house is solidly constructed, typical of a government building of that time. There can be no doubt that this building was the school residence, and it must therefore be the oldest building still standing in the Sunny Corner district.

Mr. Medcalf, the teacher, may have benefitted by the use of the new school residence for two years. But by November 1878 he had had enough of the low standard of society at Mitchell's Creek. He asked to be transferred elsewhere, and described his stay at Mitchell's Creek as follows:

I have been located upwards of four years at Mitchell's Creek. During that time I have been almost totally without society, there not being any educated people in the neighbourhood. Being naturally dull children in this neighbourhood, it tries me mentally and physically almost beyond my strength to make them at all presentable for examination.

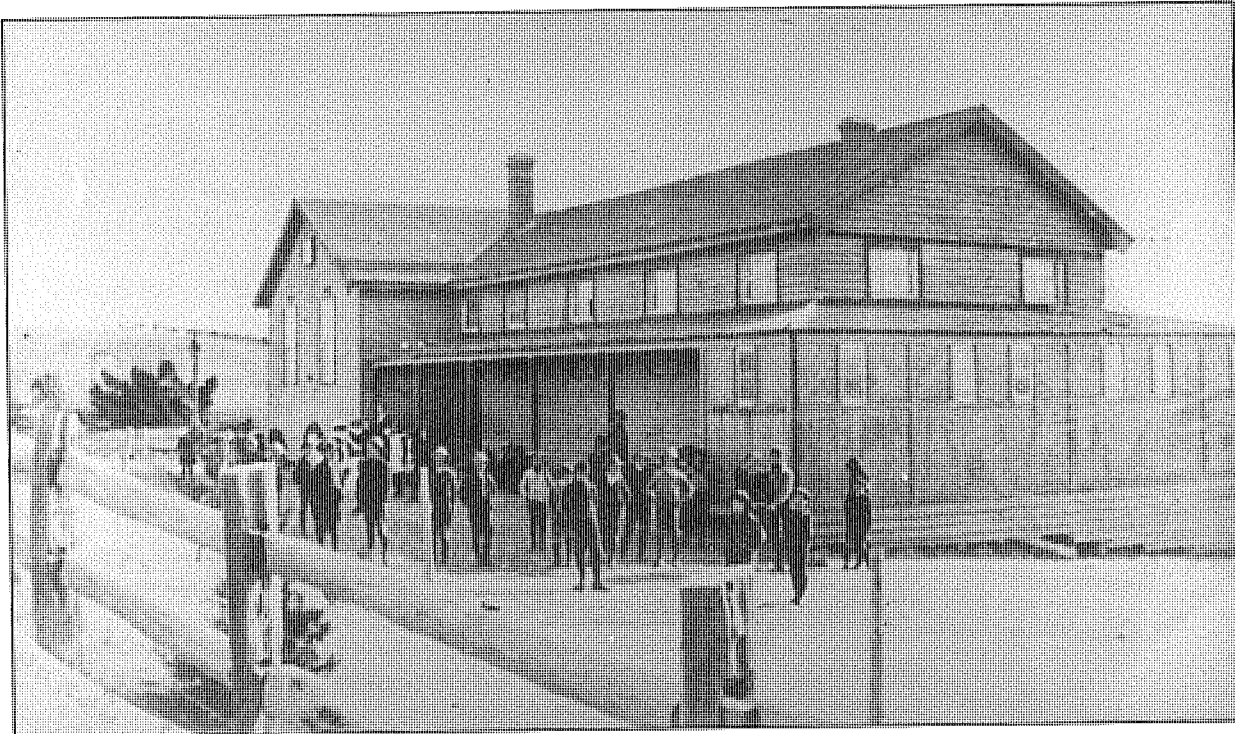
Mr. Medcalf also said that many of the pupils only attended because he did not insist on their parents paying school fees. They were to pay "when they were able", which in practice was never. This was the only way in which the average attendance could be kept above twenty-five, at that time the minimum for a public school. Smaller schools were classed as provisional schools, and teachers were paid less. Attendance was not compulsory and many families did not bother to send their children to school. The school fees were only a matter of pence per week, but still some families could not afford this. Mr. Medcalf's salary was £1/7/6 a week rising to £2/10/- a week, before he left.

Mr. Medcalf was transferred to Condobolin in May 1879. The journey took

The school after a heavy snowfall, about 1908. Photo by George C. Fraser, courtesy Col Ferguson, Palmer's Oakey

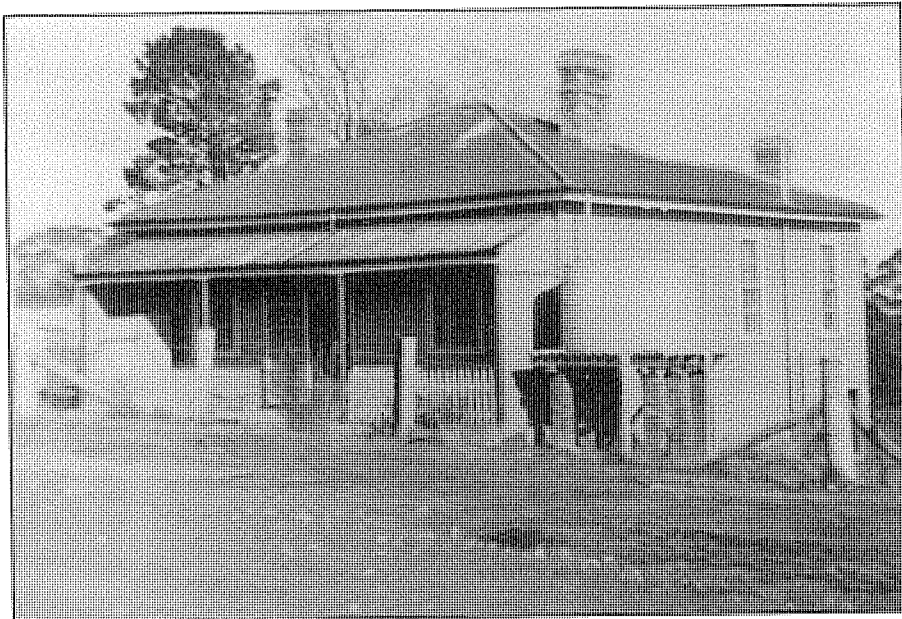






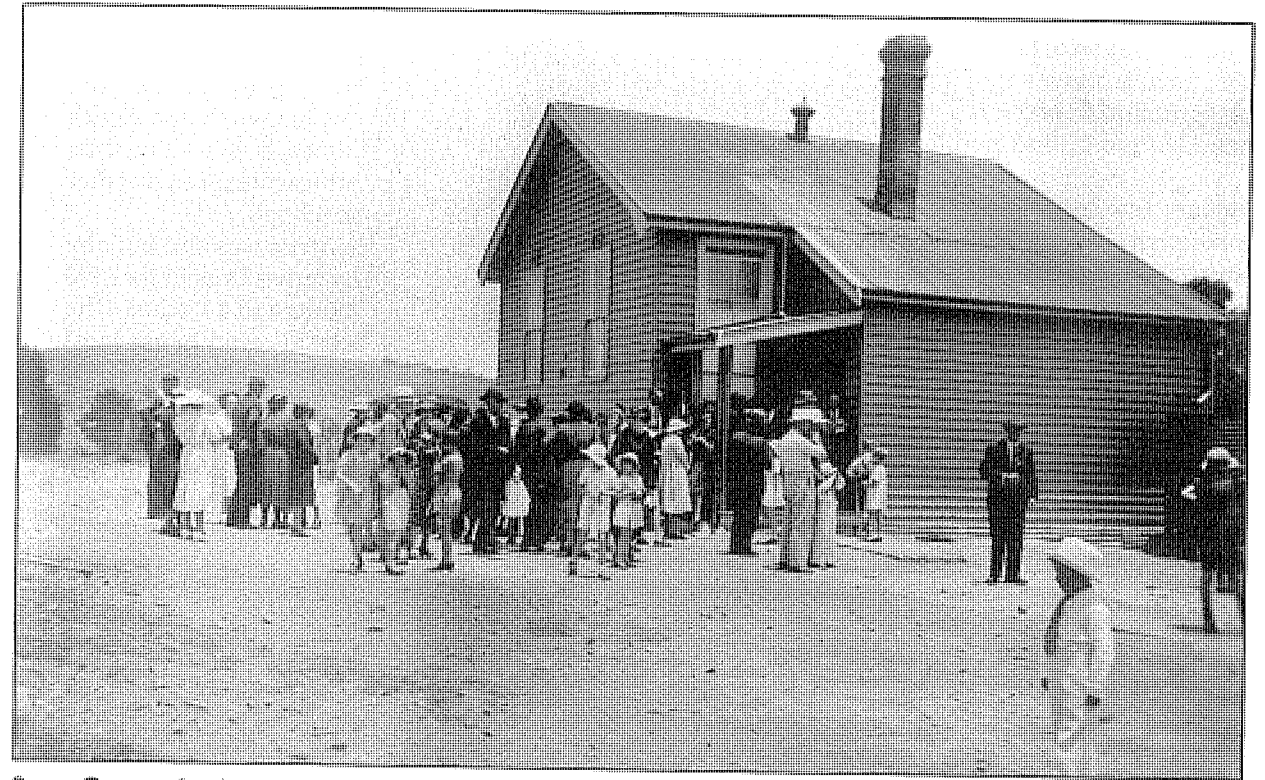
Above: Sunny Corner Public School, c1920. Photo courtesy Col Ferguson, Palmer's Oakey

At right: The schoolteacher's residence, 1950-52. Photo courtesy Frank Storey, Woy Woy



about a week, and despite a travel grant of £16, Mr. Medcalf was still considerably out of pocket in travel expenses.

Mr. Ebenezer Watts taught at Mitchell's Creek from 1879 to 1881. His successor was Mr. Charles Thomson, who only stayed four months. Then came Mr. Cooke, to be followed by Mr. Francis McPhail in January 1884. Mr. McPhail had taught at Meadow Flat school for three years, and after that at Oberon, before he came to Mitchell's Creek. He was to remain at Sunny Corner for the next eight years.



Sunny Corners school reunion, 1938. Note that most of the school has been removed, leaving only this single classroom. Photo courtesy T. Parmenter, Sydney

Mr. McPhail kept a photograph album during his stay at Sunny Corner. It was in 1884 that the silver mine was opened, and the town of Sunny Corner was begun, and the next eight years covered the boom years of Sunny Corner. McPhail's album was passed down to Bruce McPhail, grandson of Francis, who lives in Lithgow. It contains many interesting photographs of the mine and the town, and many of them are included in this book.

Mr. McPhail had the reputation of being a severe disciplinarian. He was asked by the school inspector to limit corporal punishment only to extreme cases! Will Jeffree was a pupil of Mr. McPhail, and in his short memoirs he did not mention the cane, but the fact that the boys were on occasion asked to fetch beer from the pub for McPhail. "My mother said we were not to do it", said Will, "but Father said, 'if he sends you down again, bring the beer home to me.'"

While the school was still at Mitchell's Creek, the enrolment reached 167 during 1885, and an assistant was clearly necessary. Miss Ida Gower, formerly in charge of Dark Corner School, was moved to Mitchell's Creek to assist Mr. McPhail. In this year the name of Mitchell's Creek was changed to West Mitchell, with the main township of Sunny Corner then being known as Mitchell.

The local Sunny Corner Progress Committee lobbied for a new school to be built in Sunny Corner itself, as West Mitchell was no longer central. Most people were then living in the new town of Sunny Corner. Also the West Mitchell school was in a poor state of repair.

A new school was built at Sunny Corner, by James Donald of Lithgow, at a cost of £1,250. This was a very large wooden building with an iron roof, and it opened early in 1886.

During 1885, there were two private schools in Sunny Corner and also a Catholic school. This helped to ease the pressure on the overcrowded school at West Mitchell. About 120 pupils attended the two private schools, and another sixty pupils were at the Catholic school. Mrs. Vellenoweth from South Australia ran one school. Jane Johnston and Annie Holman, both waiting to be appointed by the Department of Education as pupil-teachers, ran another school. Miss O'Donnell was in charge of the Catholic school.

At the Sunny Corner Public School, a teacher's residence was also built by the end of 1886. It is still standing today. It was built by James Donald for £390 and consisted of a weatherboard cottage with four rooms and a kitchen. The builder would have done the job for £350 had he been allowed to use local timber, but this was considered inferior. Early in 1887 Mr. McPhail was given permission to move the old weathershed from the Mitchell's Creek school, up to Sunny Corner, for his own use as a woodshed and wash-house.

After the school opened at Sunny Corner (and the school at West Mitchell was closed), Mr. McPhail was still obliged to live at the West Mitchell residence for twelve months until the new residence was completed at Sunny Corner. There were some problems with vandalism at the school during that period, as there was no one to keep an eye on the school after hours.

By the end of 1886, school enrolment had risen to 306, although the average attendance was only 202, with attendance not being compulsory. In January 1887 the school was divided into primary and infants' departments, with Miss Mary White appointed Infants' Mistress. Mr. McPhail took charge of the primary pupils. Miss Elizabeth Poyitt was appointed pupil-teacher in the

Students at Sunny Corner school, 1886-92. Photo courtesy Bruce McPhail, Lithgow



same year. Miss White soon resigned to marry a local man, Mr. Arnold Rigby.

The old school and residence at West Mitchell continued to be used. George Shumack rented a school building there for five shillings a week, during 1887 and 1888. This building was described as a "very old wooden building", so presumably this referred to the original school building, built about 1863, and not the newer residence of 1876.

In September 1886, the Sunny Corner Hospital Committee was granted possession of "the old school-house at Mitchell's Creek" for use as a temporary hospital. It is not certain if this referred to the school or the residence, and quite possibly this temporary hospital never came about due to a lull at the silver mines the following year.

The school buildings at West Mitchell were auctioned about 1930. Millie and Tom Fitzgerald bought the school residence and opened a general store. During the Depression years of the 1930s they held the franchise which allowed them to cash the men's dole cheques, and this money would have been then spent at the store. After several years the store closed but the building was still used as a residence. "General Store" could still be read in faint letters on the side wall of the building until quite recently.

The year 1887 was a slack time at the Sunny Corner silver mine, and many smaller mines had failed completely. Many people were unable to pay the school fees due to unemployment, and others left town in the dead of night, leaving all their debts unpaid.

Students at Sunny Corner school, 1886-92. Photo courtesy Bruce McPhail, Lithgow







Students at Sunny Corner school, 1942. Left to right, back row: Ken Kissell, Bobby Harper, John Martin, Johnny Guihot, Laura Passeri, John James (teacher), Iris Smith, Betty Fitzgerald, Fred Neale. Front row: Tommy Stait, Jimmy Harper, Anne Harper, Betty Passeri, Beryl Kissell, Billy Grabham, Ted Martin, Ron Kissell. Photo courtesy Iris Collins, Sunny Corner

died. Mr. Moran himself was taken ill in October 1901 with influenza but he became paralysed and was unable to understand anything. He died on 7th December, 1901. During Mr. Moran's term there was a decline in enrolments and the Primary and Infants' departments were combined.

The evening school had a short revival in August 1897, with the assistant teacher from Sunny Corner giving lessons (Mr. J.H. Treehy). But by November numbers were down, due to compulsory fees and other nightly attractions. One night of nil attendance resulted because of a free moonlight concert given by an itinerant medicine vendor.

The school, in the 1890s, had five teachers, consisting of Mr. Moran (headmaster), one male assistant, two female assistants, and Miss Mary Chelley as pupil-teacher.

The school was still called Mitchell Public School until 1899, even though the official name of the town had been changed back to Sunny Corner from Mitchell in September 1887, and likewise the name of the post office in August 1888. The school was finally known as Sunny Corner Public School from December 1899.

After 1900, the school enrolment declined rapidly, the average attendance in 1904 was only seventy-two. It had been over 300 in 1886.

Mr. Christopher Chiplin became headmaster from January 1902. He was to stay until 1918. During his stay he planted many trees and shrubs in the school grounds. He also had to fight to retain a full heating allowance for the school. Although the numbers had declined, the schoolrooms were still very large and draughty. The main schoolroom had two fireplaces, and the smaller room had



Students at Sunny Corner school, 1899. Photo courtesy Mrs Linda Smith, Bathurst

But the mine recovered, and in 1890 an evening public school was started by Mr. McPhail. This was for young men over school age who wished to continue their education. But after only two months it was forced to close through lack of numbers. The Salvation Army had come to town and the young men preferred to play in the brass band of the "Sallies" rather than attend night school. Brass bands were a tradition of the Cornish miners, who were known as Cousin Jacks, and there must have been many Cousin Jacks in Sunny Corner at that time.

In 1891 the town reservoir was completed and water was laid on to the township. The water pipes were extended so that the school and court house could be supplied with water. Up till now the school had relied on tank water which had been contaminated by the fumes of the mine furnaces. The work was done by George Francis, a local plumber, for £9/5/- and was completed in May 1892. A single standpipe and tap outside the school building was soon transferred inside the building, due to the frequent bursting of the pipe during cold weather.

The Sunny Corner mine closed during 1892, and although it did re-open again, it never recovered properly. It was the sounding of the death-knell for the town of Sunny Corner, and people began to leave.

Mr. McPhail left during 1892, and was replaced by Michael Moran. Mr. Moran had an unhappy time at Sunny Corner. In January 1896 his child, aged eighteen months, died. In the same year, in August, his wife became ill and



one fireplace. The winters at Sunny Corner are of course, long and cold with sometimes heavy snowfalls. With less pupils, the schoolrooms were probably even colder than they had been before.

In 1909 the average attendance was only about forty, and the staff had been reduced to Mr. Chiplin plus one assistant. Mr. Chiplin was not remembered fondly by one of his students, Mrs. Linda Smith, who remembers his frequent use of the cane, not only on the boys, but on the girls also, herself included!

In 1916 alterations were made to the main school room. It was described in winter as "cold, draughty and cheerless". The main room was subdivided with a glazed partition, and the windows were altered to give better lighting.

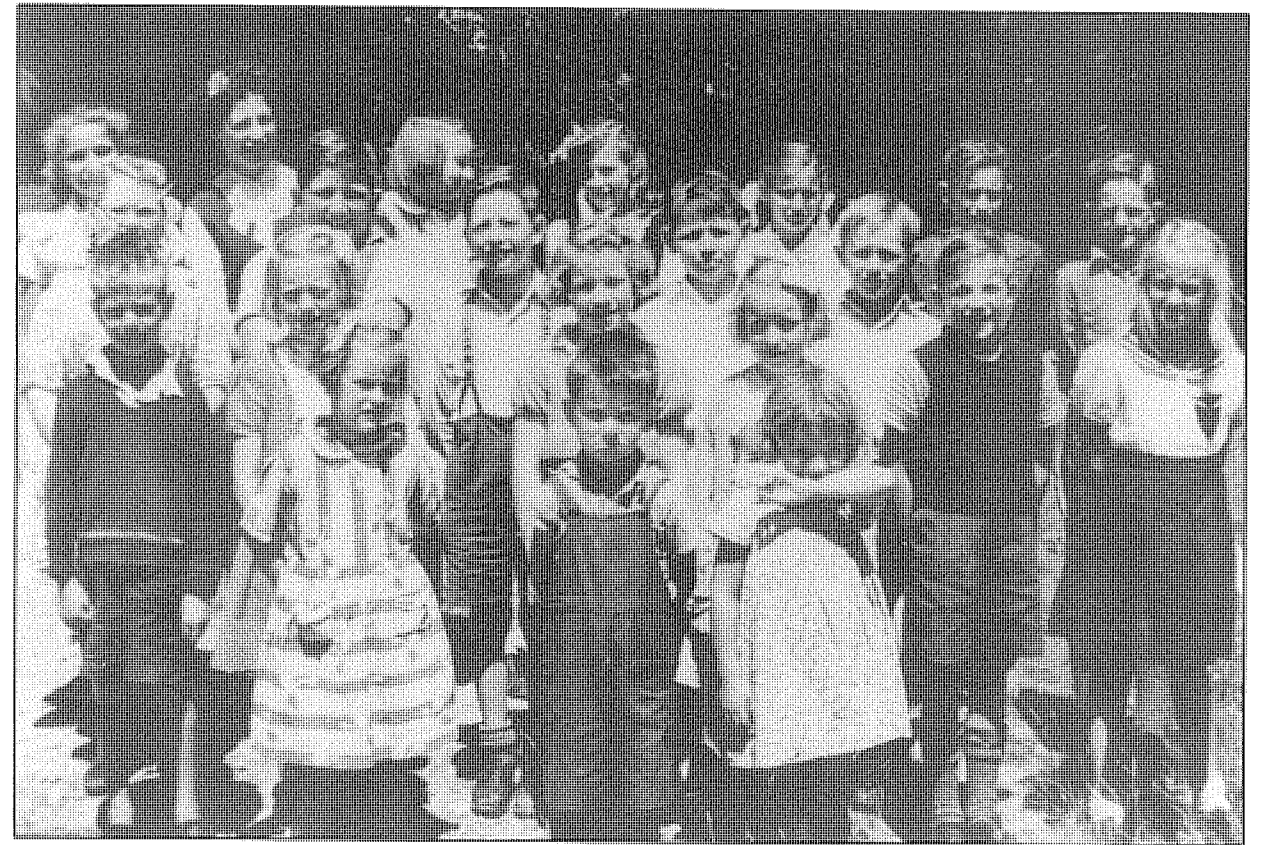
Mr. Edward Ryan succeeded Mr. Chiplin in July 1918. Numbers fell rapidly after the end of the war in 1918. In 1922 the assistant teacher was withdrawn, and the school was carried on in one classroom. Mr. Ryan left in 1924.

Mr. Ryan thought the school residence was one of the worst he had lived in: The floors are uneven, the ceilings in places are giving way, and the kitchen walls are so bad that on a windy night a candle cannot be kept alight there. After every fall of snow someone has to clean out the snow which falls in the house, driven there through the defective walls and ceilings.

The inspecting architect's report stated:

As the walls have opened away from the brick stacks in places, owing to the settlement of the foundation blocks, the residence is hardly habitable in winter. Otherwise the building is fairly sound, and when renovated could

Students at Sunny Corner school, about 1950. Left to right, back row: Tommy Stait, Bobby Harper, Betty Passeri, Anne Harper, Maxine Shirlaw. Front row: Ray Scott, Clive Scott, Barbara Theobald, Alan Theobald, Colleen Ross, Dorothy Ryan, Kerry Wilkinson, Kath Ryan. Photo courtesy Iris Collins, Sunny Corner



Students at Sunny Corner school, about 1954. Left to right, back row: Orana Kostrava, Dorothy Ryan, Beryl Scott, Kath Ryan, Sophie Kostrava, Clive Scott, Kerry Wilkinson. Second row: Barbara Theobald, Dennis Sharp, Rodney Theobald, Jan Kostrava, Peter Howarth. Third row: Keith Paine, Margaret Scott, Dorothy Sharp, Kathy Sharp, Harold Scott, Sue Wilkinson. Fourth row: June Ryan, Lindsay Paine, Nancy Paine. Photo courtesy Frank Storey, Woy Woy

be made comfortable.

The necessary repairs and renovations were done at a cost of £140.

It should be noted here that the school residence at Sunny Corner is still in use. It had been abandoned with the closure of the school in 1979, and subjected to vandalism for the next five years. The old residence then was passed to a group of local trustees who restored it with volunteer labour, and the building is once again inhabited, and in good order.

The school building however, did not fare so well, and in 1925, with James Farrelly as headmaster, it was almost completely demolished and removed to Bathurst Public School. A single classroom was left at Sunny Corner. Albert Calderbank was headmaster from 1925 to the end of 1928. Enrolments then were only about fifteen pupils. David Jollie followed in 1929 and stayed until December 1931. During his stay the Parents' and Citizens' Association was active. The school building was used for a dance, and progressive euchre parties (card parties) were held every second Saturday night to raise funds for the school.

William Cresswell came in January 1932 and remained for ten years, the longest period for any teacher at Sunny Corner. During his stay, in 1937, a rainwater tank had to be installed, as the water piped from the town reservoir was often rusty and tasted bad. A square water tank, installed by Mr. Chiplin, was now beyond repair. The tank was supplied and painting and repairs were carried out on the school residence, costing £62.

Mr. John James replaced Mr. Cresswell, and during his stay the P. & C. built



a tennis court at the school. This was used by the school children and also by local residents every weekend. The tennis court at the recreation ground which had opened about 1897 had long since fallen into disrepair. The P. & C. also provided the school with a battery wireless set.

Frank Storey was teacher from 1951 to 1956 and was able to persuade the authorities to connect electricity to the school in 1956. An assistant teacher, Mr. Cobb, taught the infants in another building, the Oddfellows' Hall, during those years, while Mr. Storey taught the primary students in the single classroom that remained on the school site.

Trevor Parmenter was appointed in January 1957. He compiled the first history of Sunny Corner, which was produced as a centenary booklet in 1961. This centenary celebrated the opening of the first post office at Mitchell's Creek in January 1862.

Teachers that followed Mr. Parmenter were: Brian Benson, Gerald Attuell, Doug Mann, Ian Case, Alan Robson and Don Gordon. The Sunny Corner Public School closed on 8th June 1979, due to low numbers, although the town's population has since increased. The schoolroom, a demountable one when the school closed, was taken to Rydal but Rydal school is now also closed.

The primary schoolchildren from the Sunny Corner area now travel by bus to Meadow Flat school, and high school students travel into Bathurst, also by a special school bus. There is no other public transport to Sunny Corner.

#### *Dark Corner School*

A provisional school was opened at Dark Corner in 1872, some eight years after the school at Mitchell's Creek was opened. Gold miners and farmers lived at Dark Corner, and about thirty pupils were enrolled in the early years of the school, with an average attendance of about twenty.

In 1877 the school was being conducted in a church building. The children were described by the school inspector as being orderly and well behaved, but he did not consider their intelligence to be of a high order! The teaching, he said, was being carried on with industry but with only indifferent skill. Susan Mara was the teacher then, she taught from 1875 to 1878, followed by Isabella Mockett.

The status of the school was raised from that of provisional school to public school in February 1882, and a teacher with better qualifications, Ida Gower, was appointed.

Plans were drawn up for a proper school building in 1882, to be situated next to the cemetery. But this was considered unsuitable as the cemetery might need to be extended. So a new site was chosen, near the creek. Two acres were reserved for the building of a school room and a teacher's residence, and a school reserve of 20 acres adjoined.

But the school enrolment declined from thirty-seven to twenty between 1881 and 1883 due to a population movement towards Sunny Corner. The plans for a teacher's residence were scrapped, and only a small school room was built. It was completed in October 1884, and was built by Thomas Kirk for £65. The building was of wood, with an iron roof, and measured 18 feet by 14 feet. It contained four long desks and forms, and had two windows placed behind the children, the usual arrangement at that time.



Above: Students at Sunny Corner school, 1963. Left to right, back row: Chris Guihot, Trevor Parmenter (teacher), Andrew Shumack, Brian Elms, Geoff Munro, Rodney Theobald, Ted Stait, David Theobald. Second row: Jimmy Sharp, Judith Shumack, Lia Rheinder, Nancy Paine, Heather Elms, Lorraine Scott, Mavis Kissell, Pam Shumack, Helen Ryan, Kevin Guihot. Third row: Trish Shumack, Margaret Howarth, Elaine Kissell, Marianne Rheinder, Helen Howarth. Photo courtesy T. Parmenter

At right: The Stait sisters, c1910 – all except one were born at Sunny Corner between 1876 and 1891, and all attended Sunny Corner school. Left to right, standing: Edith, Bertha, Emily, Ada, Ida. Seated: Annie, Sarah, Jessie. Photo courtesy Don Stait, Sydney

One night in August 1886 the glass in the school windows was smashed by vandals, and so wooden shutters were fixed outside the windows to protect them at night.

Florence Mercer was the teacher for a short time in 1887, and she was followed by Selina Cook.





Students at Dark Corner school, 1895. Left to right, back row: Bill Clarke, Jack Martin, Bob Cooper, Len Cooper, Bob Ross, Jim Martin, Aiden Shumack. Second row: Elizabeth Shumack, unknown, Kate Ross, Miss McManus (teacher), Carrie Cooper, Mary Shumack, Agnes Shumack. Third row: Jessie Ross, Edith Cooper, Emily Cooper, unknown, Elsie McKay, Ethel Shumack. Photo by Beta, Sunny Corner, courtesy Martin family, Dark Corner

The number of pupils in attendance dropped to nine by 1889, but a threat to close the school resulted in an increased enrolment. Kathleen Martyn taught in 1891 but had to leave because she had nowhere to board. Elizabeth Poyitt of Sunny Corner then became the Dark Corner teacher. She was succeeded in 1893 by Clotilda Purcell.

The school was somewhat prone to vandalism, as there was no teacher's residence next door, and therefore no-one to keep an eye on the school. In 1895 the school door was smashed open, the roll book and other papers torn up and the school clock stolen. Miss Purcell considered that the culprits were likely to be boys who went out at night robbing orchards and doing other mischief.

Constance McManus was the teacher in 1897, and in 1898 she held a concert in the Victoria Hall at Sunny Corner to raise money to buy books for a school library. The concert featured an exhibition of club swinging, dumbbell and pole drill, and a maypole dance, given by the students of Dark Corner school.

The number of students had increased to forty by 1899, due to the success of a number of gold mines in the Dark Corner area.

A new school was then built. It was of weatherboard with an iron roof and measured 20 feet by 16 feet, with a verandah, and was built by Cook and Simpkins of Sunny Corner for £129. This new school building would have opened early in 1900.

Miss Mary Dolan taught at the school for a short time during 1901. She was



Above: Teachers and scholars, Dark Corner school, about 1908. Photo by George C. Fraser, courtesy Betty Park, Albury

At right: Dark Corner school, after 1902 Photo courtesy Ivy Burke, Portland

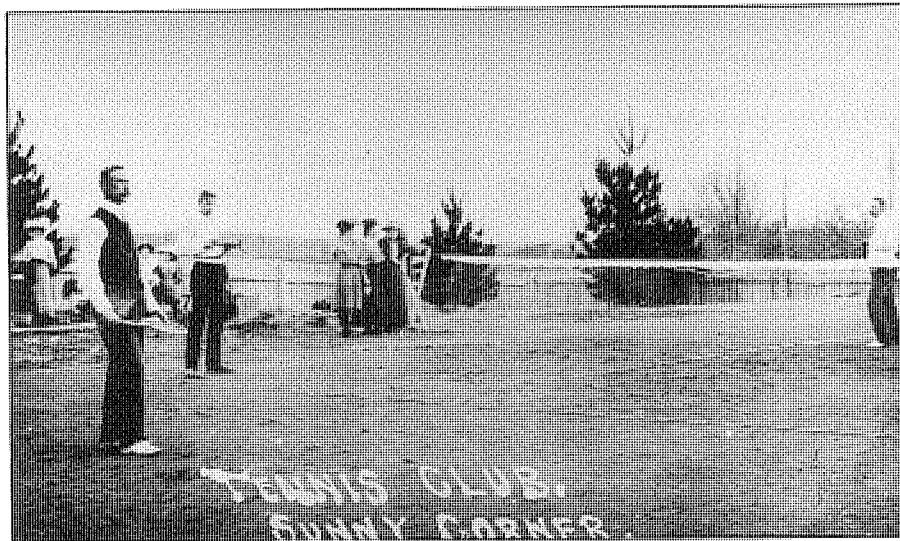






Above: Tennis, Dark Corner, November 1908. Represented are the Smith and Grabham families. Photo courtesy Iris Collins, Sunny Corner

At right: Tennis club, Sunny Corner, c1908. Photo by George C. Fraser, courtesy Col Ferguson, Palmer's Oakey



remembered by one of her pupils, Jack Martin, as "a wild Irish lass from Cork" who arrived with six new canes which were soon broken, either across the desks or across the backsides of the boys. She then had the boys cutting wild quince suckers from the banks of Dark Corner Creek "so as she could carry on the good work". Despite this harsh discipline, Jack Martin reckoned he learnt more in the six months that Miss Dolan taught him than in twelve months under any other teacher.

John Kennedy was appointed teacher in July 1901. Up till now only women had taught at the school, an indication of its low status.

Part of the school grounds were fenced off as a horse paddock, as several of the children rode horses to school. In the winter of 1905 there was a foot of snow on the ground and attendance dropped to as low as three.

Charles Stewart was the teacher from 1905 to 1912. He was given funds to buy an axe and a mattock so that the schoolboys could clear the scrub from the school grounds, a precautionary measure against snakes and bushfires. The Department of Education had refused to pay a contractor to clear the scrub, and suggested that the children should do it. Mr. Stewart considered the boys to be too young to do the work, but he said he would do what he could with the axe and mattock supplied. One of the boys, Eric Smith, remembered these clearing operations well. Mr. Stewart accidentally felled a tree on him and Eric's leg was broken!

Alfred Nichols became teacher in July 1912. Mr. Nichols drove to school with a horse and sulky. Margaret Kilfoyle, the teacher in 1917, rode a pony to school and was given a forage allowance for her pony as she was unable to find accommodation any closer than three miles from the school. She possibly lived at Sunny Corner.

In March 1921 during an epidemic of whooping cough, only one student turned up at school, out of a possible seventeen. Miss Mabel Naylor was the teacher then, and she was sent off to the school at Sunny Corner to assist Mr. Ryan with his fifty pupils. The Dark Corner school was then temporarily closed for a short time.

Robert Walker was appointed teacher in January 1931, and was followed by Hector Bell in September 1931 and Edwin Perry in January 1938. The school closed from August 1941 to March 1947 when Mavis Saunders reopened the school. She was followed by Arthur Bunker, who was to be the last teacher at Dark Corner. Due to the low number of pupils, the school was closed in March 1951.

The school building was subsequently removed to Jenolan Caves.

## KNOWN SHOPS, BUSINESSES AND GOVERNMENT ESTABLISHMENTS IN SUNNY CORNER

(Dates are included where they are known)

### Auctioneers

John Le Messurier and brothers, 1884 -  
John Hurley, 1886

### Butchers' Shops

W. Montgomery, 1884  
John McDonald, 1885-1890s  
G.H. Bryant, 1884, and Sons, 1887  
Walter and Albert Bryant (sons of G.H.), 1890s  
Bill (Wally) Sparks, 1890s, then Jack Fitzgerald until  
early 1920s, then Bob Grabham, last butcher, left ?1925

### Bakers' Shops

John (Jack) Flynn, 1884-1890s

# RICHARD LEAN,

DRAPER, BAKER, AND

## GENERAL STOREKEEPER,

BECS to call special attention to his new DRESSMAKING AND MILLINERY DEPARTMENT, under the charge of MISS ALICE ROBERTS (late of Hill End) and trusts by strict attention to ladies requirements, and moderate charges to secure a fair share of patronage.

Cashmeres, Satins, Broches, and Dress Materials of the Choicest Patterns and Good Values.

LADIES' AND CHILDREN'S UNDER-CLOTHING at LOWEST PRICES.

A large and varied Stock of Ladies' and Childrens' TRIMMED AND UNTRIMMED HATS, specially selected for the present season.

Don't Forget the Address:

**Bathurst - street, SUNNY CORNER.**

**I X L S T O R E S**

**B. COHEN,**

PROPRIETOR.

Drapery of every Description,

FANCY GOODS,

Jewellery, Gold & Silver Watches,

Chains, &c.,

AT THE LOWEST PRICES.

Tobaccos, Cigars, &c.

Note the Address:

**B. COHEN,**

Bathurst-st., near Tasker's Hotel.

**SUNNY CORNER MEDICAL HALL,**  
**MITCHELL.**

**E. PURCHASE, M.P.S.,**  
**PHARMACEUTICAL CHEMIST,**

From Holmes and Fox, London, Chemists to Her  
Majesty The Queen.)

Registered by the Board of Pharmacy, N.S.Wales,  
and the Queensland Medical Board.

TEETH CAREFULLY EXTRACTED.

**Dr. St. George,**  
PHYSICIAN AND SURGEON,  
May be Consulted here Daily.

**M**ESSRS. GORDON & GOTCH are the  
duly authorised AGENTS for the  
"SILVER PRESS" at Sydney.

### Bakers' Shops (continued)

H. Halliday, 1884

A. Kopsch, 1886

Andy Gardner (Gardiner), 1890s, ?earlier

Joe Jeffree, took over shop of Gardner's, 1890s

### Builders

Rigby Brothers, carpenters, builders and timber merchants, 1885-1890s

Hudson Brothers, ironmongery store and timber yard, 1884 -

John Hambly, builder, 1884

Geo. Dowling, builder, 1884

T.D. Clarke, builder, 1884

R. Clarke, builder, 1885/6 (also ? undertaker)

W. Price, builder, 1884

B. Bowtell, brickmaker, 1886

Fenton, bricklayer, 1890s

G. Kell, plumbing and tank works, 1885

F. Brault, French painter and house painter, 1886

### Banks

Australian Joint Stock Bank, 1885-1895

Commercial Bank, 1885-1893

### Bootmakers

A. Frappell, 1884

J. Griffin, 1884

John Drew, 1887

Phil Lawler, 1890s

Charles Stratford, 1880s

### Blacksmiths

Hay's Blacksmith Shop, 1885

W.Hoy (?Hay), blacksmith, 1884

E. Graham, blacksmith, 1884

James Cherry, blacksmith, 1884

J. Salkeld, blacksmith, 1884

J. Duke, blacksmith, 1890s

Alf Chadwick, blacksmith, 1890s

Jack Martin and son Eric, business closed early 1920s

### Boarding Houses

Eight boarding houses mentioned in 1886, including:

M. Power, 1884

Scott's, 1890s

### Billiard Rooms

Carr's, 1885

Henry Payne, billiard and hairdressing saloon, 1887

Charlie Watts, billiard room, 1890s (also barber)

### Chemists and Herbalists

Herbalist's shop, 1885

Edward Purchase, chemist, 1884, 1886

Laughton & Co., chemist and dentist, 1886

Facing page, also pages 158, 160, 162, 164, advertisements from *Sunny Corner Silver Press* 20th March and 27th March, 1886. *Newspapers courtesy Charles and Joan Applin, Wallerawang*



# Commercial Stores,

BATHURST-STREET, SUNNY CORNER.

—:0:—:0:—:0:—

## R. H. BULKELEY & CO.,

Wholesale and Retail

### GENERAL STOREKEEPERS.

Furniture, Bedstead, Bedding, &c.

Galvanised Iron, Guttering, Ridging, Dynamite and Detonators, Powder and Fuse.

Picks, Shovels, Hammers and General Mine Requisites.

BUYERS FOR CASH OF HIDES, SHEEPSKINS, WOOL & TALLOW.

Sole Agents for the Cullen Bullen Lime Company.

## G. SCHUMACK'S Sunny Corner Store

near the

Sunny Corner and Silver King Mines.

**Boots & Shoes**

**Drapery,**

**Ironmongery,**

**and Fancy Articles,**

At reasonable prices, and of the very best quality.

**Wanted.**

**T**WO Respectable Lads, about 14 or 15 years of age, as apprentices to the Printing Business. apply at the

SILVER PRESS OFFICE.



SUNNY CORNER

**BAKERY,**

Bathurst-street.

**A. KOPSCH,**

**D**ESIRES to return thanks for the liberal support accorded him by residents of Sunny Corner and neighbourhood, since he has commenced business as a BAKER and CONFECTIONER, and hopes by strict attention to business to merit a continuance of the same.

Small Goods of the best quality always on hand.

Wedding Cakes a speciality, at the shortest notice.

Fresh Bread delivered every morning.

**A.**

**B R O W N L O W S**

**GENERAL**

**GROCERY AND PRODUCE STORE.**

Opposite Royal Hotel, Bathurst-st.

ALL KINDS of PRODUCE BOUGHT for CASH

**MITCHELL and NYNGAN.**

### *Cordial Makers*

E. Summons, cordial maker, 1884

R. Whitely, cordial maker, 1884

Thomas J. Eather, cordial factory, 1887, 1890s

### *Confectioner*

Miss Agnes Jones, confectioner and tobacconist, 1887-1920s

### *Carriers*

Steve Dawson, horse team, 1890s

Billy Doble, horse team, 1890s

Tim and Tom Pullen, horse team, 1890s

George Stait, horse team, 1890s

many horse and bullock teams in 1880s

### *Coaches*

Donnelly Brothers Coaches, Bathurst-Sunny Corner, 1886

Creasy's Line of Coaches, Bathurst-Sunny Corner, 1886

Mara's Coaches, Sunny Corner-Wallerawang, 1886

Also other coach lines passed through, including Cobb & Co.

### *Court House and Police Station*

rebuilt 1885, closed during 1920s

### *Churches*

Mitchell's Creek Union Church, 1860s ?rebuilt – demolished 1940s

Catholic Church, 1885-1940

Catholic Convent, 1885-1909

Wesleyan (Methodist) Church, 1885-after 1900

Church of England, about 1886-after 1930

Presbyterian Church, 1886-about 1900

### *Doctors*

Dr. Mackintosh, 1886

Dr. J.F. Grady, 1886

Dr. St. George, 1886

Dr. Watts, 1890

Dr. Henry, 1891

Dr. Pardy, 1895

Dr. Magill, 1884-1919 approx.

### *Drapers' Shops*

Manson & Co., general draper, 1885-1890s

Wakeford and Wylie, cash drapers, 1887

Payne's Drapery Emporium, 1885-1890s

(Edward Payne, storekeeper, 1886)

Hart's (Heart's) Drapery Store, 1890s

### *Fruit Shops*

Brownlow's Fruit Mart, 1885

Mrs. Bartle's Fruit Shop, 1890s

Mrs. Stratford's Fruit Shop, 1890s

### *Fish Shop*

Mrs. G. Morpeth, fish and oyster saloon, 1890s

## Important Preliminary Announcement

# MANSON & CO.

Have now respectfully to inform the public that they have Just

Opened their NEW PREMISES, opposite Varley's Hotel,

WITH AN

## ENORMOUS STOCK

OF

GENT'S CLOTHING, GENERAL DRAPERY,  
BOOTS AND SHOES,

of the most fashionable, richest and best description and all of which are now being sold at

Unprecedentedly Low Prices.

# MANSON & CO.,

Importers of Millinery, Drapery, Clothing, and Boots,

Sunny Corner, Forbes, Parkes, Hill End, Hokitika, Greymouth,  
and late Collins-street, Melbourne, Beechworth, &c.



MARA'S LINE OF COACHES.

RUNNING DAILY BETWEEN

SUNNY CORNER & WALLERAWANG.

Leave Sunny Corner at 9 a.m. (daily), arriving at Wallerawang at 11.30 a.m. Returning leave Wallerawang at 4 p.m., arriving at Sunny Corner at 6.30.

Booking Offices at Varley's Hotel, Sunny Corner; Murray's Hotel, West Mitchell; and Shaw's Hotel, Wallerawang.

DONNELLY BROTHERS' COACHES

RUN BETWEEN

BATHURST AND MITCHELL

EVERY DAY.

CALL AT ANY HOTEL FOR PASSENGERS.

Fares: Five Shillings; Return, Nine Shillings

Careful Drivers and Comfortable Coaches.

SUNNY CORNER OR MITCHELL.

Creasy's Line of Coaches

LEAVE

Sunny Corner for Bathurst,

every day in the week at 3.45 p.m.

FARES: Single 5s; Return (available for two days) 9s.

Visitors to Bathurst will find first-class accommodation at the Haymarket Hotel.

E. CREASEY, Proprietor.

LE MESSURIER BROTHERS.

AUCTIONEERS AND

COMMISSION AGENTS,

BATHURST-STREET.

FIRE, LIFE, & INSURANCE AGENTS.

MINING AND PROPERTY AGENTS.

ACCOUNTS COLLECTED, &c.

### General Stores

P. Lonerigan, shopkeeper, 1884

R. Main, storekeeper, 1884

H. Prince, storekeeper, 1884

W. Edwards, storekeeper, 1884

W. Varley's Stores, 1884, 1885 (also John, publican)

R.H. Bulkeley & Co., general store, 1884-1925

Manson & Co, general store, clothing & drapery, 1886-1890s

A. Brownlow, general grocery & produce store, 1886-

Le Blang Store, 1890s

Mann's General Store, 1884-pre 1920

I.X.L. Stores, Ben Cohen, 1886, 1890s, closed after 1900

Munro's Store (?general), 1885

Beehive Stores, Richard Lean, 1886, 1890s

George Holman, shopkeeper, 1890s

George Shumack, general storekeeper, 1886-

John Shumack, Mitchell's Creek store, 1887

On Sing & Co, general Chinese store, 1887

### General & Produce Stores

Charles Clifton, produce store, 1885, 1887-

Thos. Tobin, chaff store, 1884

### Hairdressers

Henry Payne, billiard & hairdressing saloon, 1887

Watts' Hairdressing Saloon, 1885

Charlie Watts, black barber, also billiard room, 1890s

### Hospital

Two hospital tents, 1885

Hospital built about 1892

### Hotels

West Mitchell

Star Inn, prior to 1866

Lachlan's (McLachlan's), prior to 1866-?1880s (McLachlan, Radburne, C. Murray)

Miner's Arms Hotel, 1883-1887 (C. Murray)

Sunny Corner

Royal Hotel, 1884-1922 (Varley, C. Roberts, G. Francis, C. Murray)

Royal Exchange Hotel, 1884-1913 (Tasker, Cullen, Murray)

Star Hotel, 1884-1901 (Weinert)

Criterion Hotel, 1885-1890s (Snape)

Commercial Hotel, possibly Snapes Hotel under different management, advertised 1887, details not known.

Silver Street Hotel, 1886-1890s (Lane, Brognorcolly, Roberts)

Court House Hotel, 1886-after 1900 (Havenhand)

Club House Hotel, 1886-1900 or later (Draper, Thomas)

Tattersall's Hotel, ?1888-1900 or later (Egan, Carr, J. Murray)

### Jewellers' Shops

F. Nicholl, jeweller, 1886

Carr's Jeweller, 1890s



## MITCHELL'S CREEK STORE.

**John Schumack,**  
DRAPER, GROCER,  
IRONMONGER,  
BAKER, &c.

Has one of the Largest and Best  
**Assorted Stocks,**  
IN THE DISTRICT,  
and at the Lowest Possible Prices.

GIVE A CALL AND SEE FOR YOURSELVES.

## A. S. MANN & CO.

Forwarding & Commission Agents,

### PIPER'S FLAT,

Have regular daily communication between  
Piper's Flat and Sunny Corner, and those  
who get their goods by this road have the  
advantage of the  
**Shortest, Quickest, and Cheapest Route.**

Goods for Sunny Corner should be addressed  
care of A. S. MANN and Co., Piper's Flat.

**Bricks! Bricks!! Bricks!!!**

GOOD BRICKS for sale at reasonable prices  
Apply—  
B. BOWTELL, Brickmaker.  
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Auction sales of Furniture, Buggies, Pianos, and  
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BRAULT, FRENCH PAINTER, who will work  
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Varnish for sale.

### Music Teachers

Mrs. Maxey, 1886  
Mrs. Gannon, 1887

### Newsagents

W.S. Waugh, newsagency, 1884, 1890s  
Sparks, took over from Waugh, closed about 1920

### Newspaper

Sunny Corner Silver Press, 1886 or earlier  
The Crucible

### Photographers

Eclipse Photographic Company, G.D.B. Kitch & Co., 1884-1890s  
George Fraser, after 1900 (also ?before - also his son Charles, both in Sunny  
Corner in 1920s)  
Beta, Sunny Corner  
William T.G. Palmer, 1890s, formerly a decorator  
Various travelling photographers

Police Station and Court House  
1884-1925

Post and Telegraph Office  
1885-1985

### Sawmill

John Hurley, large steam sawmill, 1885

### Saddlery

M. Tattersall, saddle and harness maker, 1887, 1890s

### Schools

Two private schools, 1885  
Catholic School, 1885-1909  
Public school, Mitchell's Creek, 1864-1885  
Public school, Sunny Corner, 1885-1979

### Tailors and Dressmakers

W.T. Louis, tailor, 1884  
Mrs. Thomas, dressmaker and milliner, 1887  
Miss Alice Roberts, dressmaker and milliner (Lean's) 1886  
Miss M.N. Llewellyn, dressmaker prior to 1914, then post office  
Cohen, tailor, 1890s

### Tobacconists

R. Llewellyn's Cigar Divan, 1885-1890s  
Miss Jones, confectionery and tobacconist

### Timber Merchants

Hudson Brothers, 1885  
Rigby Brothers, 1885-1890s  
John Hurley, steam sawmill, 1885

### Undertakers

R. Clark, 1886  
J. Simpkins, 1890s

# RIGBY BROTHERS,

## BUILDERS & CONTRACTORS,

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BATHURST STREET, SUNNY CORNER,

Estimates given for all descriptions of Buildings, &c., &c.

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## R. CLARK,

### UNDERTAKER,

BATHURST-STREET, MITCHELL,

Funerals undertaken at the Shortest Notice.

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DEALER IN

CIGARS, TOBACCO, & SMOKER'S ARTICLES

Fancy Goods and Notions,

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MAIN STREET, MITCHELL.

## £4000

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### BOOTS & SHOES

TO SELECT FROM AT

## John Hunter's

### CITY BOOT PALACE

Men's Kind Walking Shoes, 5/ 5/9, 7/6, 9/6.  
 " Elastic Sides, 4/6, 4/9, 5/9, 7/6.  
 Women's Lasting Boots, 3/0, 4/11, 5/6, 6/9, 7/6.  
 Men's Best Hand Closed, H.P., black 7/6.  
 " Plain E.S. 5/9, 6/6, 7/6, 8/6 9/6.  
 Men & Women's Slippers, from 1/11, 2/2 3/ 3/3, 3/9.  
 Infant's Boots and Shoes, from 1/3, 1/5, 1/9, 2/3, 2/6.

Goods sent to Sunny Corner and district on receipt of remittance, at 2½ per cent discount on the above prices.

**JOHN HUNTER'S**  
 City Boot Palace,  
 WILLIAM-STREET, BATHURST.

[A CARD.]

## J. F. GRADY, M.D.

PHYSICIAN & SURGEON,

Corner Austral and Newton Streets,

MITCHELL.

Office Hours: 10 to 11 a.m.; 2 to 3 p.m.

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## DR. ST. GEORGE,

Physician and Surgeon,

Late Surgeon to the Burrage Copper Mine, also

Assistant Surgeon to the N.S.W. Contingent.

Has commenced practice in Sunny Corner,

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AT MR. PURCHASE'S, CHEMIST,

Between the Hours of 9 to 11 a.m., and 4 to 8 p.m.

## C R I T E R I O N H O T E L.

### JOHN SNAPE,

(LATE OF PINE RIDGE),

Begs to inform the inhabitants of Mitchell and surrounding district that he has opened

**The Criterion Hotel at Mitchell.**

GOOD ACCOMMODATION.

WINES and SPIRITS of the Very Best Brands.

Note the Address:

**JOHN SNAPE,**

Criterion Hotel, Mitchell.

## LIFE AFTER THE MINE - 1900-1980s

Sunny Corner township had sprung into existence as if by magic with the opening of the Sunny Corner silver mine in 1884. Before that the whole area was bushland. Twenty years before, in the 1860s, people had lived at Mitchell's Creek, about two kilometres west of Sunny Corner, and had made a living at gold mining.

The Sunny Corner silver mine gave employment to miners on a large scale for only about eight years. Up to 500 men or more were employed there at any one time. After these boom years, the mine was still worked, rather intermittently and with many problems, giving irregular employment to a greatly reduced number of men.

Other silver mines at Sunny Corner fared worse. The Silver King mine had once employed 150 men, but was mined out after about six years. The Nevada mine had difficulties right from the start. A rash of smaller mines faltered and died within a year or so of their commencement.

So Sunny Corner underwent a gradual transformation from a lively mining town with a population of at least 4,000, to a more subdued rural district after the mines closed.

Most of the miners moved away to other mining areas where they could find work. A few stayed on to look for gold. And others took to farming, growing crops such as potatoes and peas, and running sheep and cattle. The families here were generally poor, and self sufficiency played a large part in their survival.

The buildings of the township had included hundreds of dwellings. These were demolished as people moved away. Many houses were dismantled and transported to Portland by horse and wagon when the Portland Cement Works began in 1902. Many Sunny Corner people too, moved on to Portland at this time to find work. A few of the town buildings remained as landmarks; Bulkeley's store still stood in the 1920s. The old post office store burned down in 1970, and the Royal Hotel burned to the ground in 1979 leaving its two chimneys which can still be seen today. These chimneys are almost the only landmarks left to indicate the existence of the original township. None of the original buildings were built of anything more substantial than weatherboard and iron, so they were easily dismantled.

But there are still enigmatic reminders to be found, such as old wells, old broken bottles, hand made nails, crockery fragments and so on. Col Wilkinson remembers an old and faded sign by the roadside near the recreation ground which read "Mann's for Everything", back in the 1920s. The store had gone then, but Mrs. Linda Smith can remember back further than this. Born about 1904, she went shopping with her mother at Mrs. Mann's general store, and she also remembers how the kindly Mrs. Mann would toss out a few lollies to the children who passed the shop on their way home from school, and the mad scramble that ensued! Mrs. Smith also remembers shopping at Bulkeley's store and how, on payment of the family account, a large paper bag of sweet biscuits was given out as a bonus. (Bulkeley's store at Sunny Corner remained open until about 1922, and was demolished in the early 1930s.) There were four hotels still standing when Mrs. Smith was a young girl; The Royal Exchange, The Royal, Weinert's and Havenhand's. Murray's ran the Royal Exchange but



later moved over to the Rôyal which was to become Sunny Corner's last hotel, finally closing in 1922.

Miss Jones' Lollie Shop was also open until the early 1920s. This tiny store sold tobacco and lollies, the latter being displayed in a glass fronted cabinet – boiled lollies, sherbert cones, musk sticks, licorice and chewing gum sticks, and wrapped lollies four-a-penny. Agnes Jones continued to live in the building after the store closed. The chimney still stands today.

Other stores which closed during the 1920s were Sparks' Newsagent, Grabham's Butcher Shop and Bulkeley's Store.

By the 1940s the town had almost disappeared, the churches were gone, all the stores, seven of the eight hotels, and most of the houses. A large portion of the school had been removed in 1927, leaving a solitary small classroom. Sunny Corner never really became a ghost town as virtually the whole township was removed elsewhere.

So what was life like at Sunny Corner after 1900? Primitive, by today's standards! No cars, no television, in fact not even any electricity until the 1950s.

Col Wilkinson has recounted some of the aspects of life at Sunny Corner from the 1920s to the 1950s, and his experiences and those of his family would be typical of many others also. Col came to Sunny Corner with his family when he was four years old, in about 1918, and stayed on to marry and raise his own family at Sunny Corner.

Col remembers the first "radio" in Sunny Corner in 1924. This was a crystal set which had been built by Alec McDonald, a local resident. It created great interest in the town, and Alec was besieged by visitors wanting to listen in through the headphones. Col's father bought a wireless about 1935. This had to be powered by a large battery, like a car battery, as there was no electricity. The battery lasted about two or three weeks with careful use, but then it had to be recharged. The mailman would collect the battery, take it in to Bathurst for recharging, then deliver it back again.

The wireless itself was an elaborate affair and was contained in a huge polished wooden cabinet with about six knobs on the front, two of which were used simultaneously for tuning, a fine art. A large aerial was required and Col's family had two wooden poles about 25 feet high, set in the ground 20 feet apart. A piece of heavy wire was strung between the poles, and connected to a lighter copper wire attached to the wireless. Col remembers that if there was something really vital that the family was listening to, that would be the time when the battery went flat! Several Sydney stations could be picked up along with some static, and regular reminders to "Keep Cool in Manly Pool". There were also a couple of local stations available. Regular news broadcasts kept the otherwise isolated community in touch with the outside world, and such programs as Lux Radio Theatre would help to enliven the evenings.

The family also had a gramophone which was bought about 1920. It had a large green and white trumpet-like loudspeaker and played 78 rpm records after a good wind up. Each record played for about two minutes, and then the needle had to be changed. Favourite records were those of Harry Lauder, Will Fife and especially Billy Williams who sang comic songs. Those who didn't own a gramophone might sit out on their back verandahs and listen in to the wonderful sounds wafting across from the neighbour's machine. Before gramophones came in, some families had the earlier cylinder-type

phonographs.

Lighting was provided by kerosene lamps and lanterns until 1954. There was no refrigeration at all. Food was kept in a fly-proof safe which was draped with damp hessian bags. Meat was salted, and bacon was home-cured. Butter was home-churned, and lowered down the well to keep cool. Jellies, a special treat, had to be set in the coolness of the well also. Winter, of course, presented no problems with refrigeration. Col remembers making icecream, with snow being the main ingredient! Milk, cream, sugar and vanilla would be mixed up in a bowl with a fair quantity of snow, and had to be eaten before the whole lot melted. Bread was home-baked, even the yeast had to be made, from hops and potatoes. This was left to ferment in bottles, the corks tied down with string. A good brew could blow the top off and yeast would froth everywhere.

Cooking of course was done in a wood fired oven, and all firewood was cut with an axe as chainsaws hadn't been thought of then. Some people had a fixed circular saw powered by their tractor engine, and they were able to cut up lengths of wood into smaller pieces. Kerosene primus-stoves were used for cooking also.

Families could grow much of their own produce. Potatoes were a feature in many meals, they grow well in the cooler climate of Sunny Corner. Many other vegetables were grown. Apples and pears were suited to the climate. Col's mother used to dry apples. They were cored and cut into a long spiral, using a special tool, then hung on long lines of string which were placed above the iron roof. The apples would go quite brown, but if the drying was successful, the apples could be stored for later stewing. But the cool and damp weather so often a feature at Sunny Corner could ruin many a batch before they had dried properly. Cherries also did well in the cool climate. These were turned into jam, the stones removed with a patent cherry-stoner.

In the 1920s Col's mother used to make a meat paste which could be spread on bread. This was made from the breast-meat of parrots (Crimson Rosellas) which were here in abundance in those days. Other families used to make parrot pies. These were eaten with relish, and it took a fair few parrots to make one pie. Crimson Rosellas are still a common bird in the area, but back then there must have been thousands. The birds were easily caught in simple traps, using wheat to attract them.

Most families kept a cow which could be milked, and chooks provided eggs. Fruits could be bottled for later use, as could some vegetables. Potatoes would be "pitted" during the winter, i.e. stored in a heap in a big hole in the ground and covered with hay, dirt, and sheets of iron.

The rabbit provided a ready source of meat in earlier days. These were easily caught in rabbit traps, or shot with a rifle. There was no myxomatosis then to control the numbers, and the rabbits were sometimes in plague proportions. This made a handy source of income for local people. Rabbits could be sold at Yetholme, where there was a freezer. These rabbits would be caught in traps, killed and gutted, and then sold still with the skins on. If the rabbits had been poisoned, then the skins could be sold separately. Poisoning was done with strychnine, mixed up, not with carrots, but with the chopped-up roots of the black thistle plant, which looked rather like a parsnip and smelt of vanilla. Sometimes a whole truckload of rabbits would have to be disposed of after a batch of poison was laid out.

Blackberries also provided an income. These were prolific in the area. Four-

gallon kerosene tins were filled with the fruit and sold to the mailman who would collect them from the mail box; these would then be sold to jam factories.

Homes were always simple. There was no water laid on in the house. Often water would be pumped by hand from a dam or well into a square tank which was situated beside the wash-house, usually a separate building to the main house. Water was heated in a big copper, a fire being lit underneath. Baths were had in a round galvanized-iron tub, the hot water being poured in with a bucket. Men shaved with a cut-throat razor which they sharpened on a razor strop, and the women sometimes curled their hair using a warmed (and cleaned) fire poker. Home haircuts, of course, were prevalent.

On washing day the clothes would be boiled up in the copper, along with a sliced up cake of soap. This soap was either a home-brew made from fat, caustic soda and borax, or else a store-bought variety like Sunlight. After boiling, the clothes would be hoisted out of the copper with a wooden pot-stick, then put into a big concrete wash tub for rinsing. Dirty clothes were given extra scrubbing, done over a glass or wooden scrubbing board. Wringing out was done by hand, or sometimes a mangle would be used, and rinsing was done using Reckitt's blue-bags in the final rinse water. Sometimes the final rinse had to be done in tubs by the dam if there was not enough water in the tank. The washing was then hung out on a line strung between two poles, and later ironed with a flat iron. A whole series of these irons would be kept circulating, perhaps three or four, and they would be heated up on the wood stove or perhaps over a kerosene primus-stove. Sewing was done with a treadle sewing machine or by hand.

The last word in modern washing appliances in the 1940s was a hand operated washing machine. This had an agitator which was worked up and down by a long handle. One is still in use in the Wilkinson family for such things as very greasy overalls.

A more dubious item was the kerosene refrigerator, which was not particularly safe.

The toilet of course would be outside, not the best on winter nights when it snowed. Either a pit would be dug, or a pan used and later emptied. Sheets of newspaper replaced today's neat rolls of toilet tissue. Lime was used to keep the pits hygienic, and wood ash from the stove was often used in the pan toilets for the same purpose.

Inside the home the walls were often covered with newspaper, glued on with flour and water paste. Col remembers that when he was a boy, the walls of his bedroom were covered with pasted-on pages from the *Bulletin* magazine. This made interesting reading, he said, and he can still remember the *Bulletin* cartoons which were on the wall, much more interesting than modern wallpaper!

Floors might be covered with lino (never carpet!), and hessian corn bags with a decorative edging would be used for bedroom mats.

No matter how scrupulously clean and tidy the owners might be, all the old homes were riddled with mice. Rats would get into the roof and scuttle across the calico ceilings, their progress clearly visible from below. Col would, on occasions, let loose a pet ferret or two into the ceiling and the rats would become airborne in their haste to escape.

Transport – Before people owned cars, they used horse-drawn sulkies or

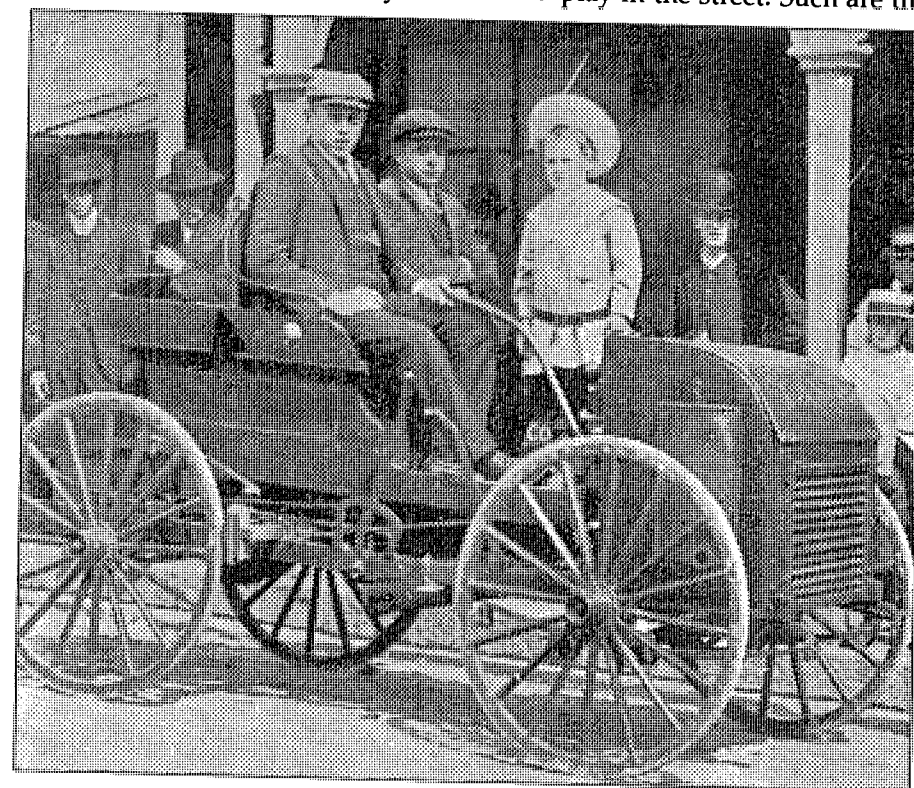
wagons, or walked. People walked great distances and thought nothing of it. Some people who could afford them had pushbikes. Col says that his brother Lance, when he was eighteen or nineteen, would quite often ride his pushbike to Sydney for the weekend. This was about 1930, and Lance considered the bright lights of the city ample reward for the effort involved – the return journey, all uphill, took at least eight hours. The distance from Sunny Corner to Sydney is 160 kilometres.

Sometime after Col married, during the 1940s, he bought a T-model Ford. This could be driven over dirt roads to Portland for shopping expeditions. The Co-Op was the main big store in Portland then. Before they had a car, the family had relied on deliveries left by the mailman at their mailbox, items such as meat, bread and groceries. An order could be placed with a store in town. There was also a small store run in conjunction with the post office. Newspapers were delivered also, but reading matter mostly consisted of constantly recycled books, handed from one person to another. There was no access to a library.

One good source of reading matter were the catalogues issued by the big Sydney stores – Grace Brothers, Nock and Kirby's, Sweet Brothers ("Where Biz Hums") and Murdock's. Anthony Hordern's had a catalogue the size of a large phone book. Many hours would be spent poring over these catalogues, and selected items, usually clothes, could be sent up by mail, and were paid for by postal note.

Families that didn't have a car would make periodic shopping trips to Portland in the horse and sulky, or horse and wagon. A trip might be made once a month, and a night would sometimes be spent at Portland before returning home. There was Friday night shopping in Portland in the 1920s and 1930s, and the Salvation Army band would play in the street. Such are the

The first car built in New South Wales (1903). Richard Lean was a talented and prominent Sunny Corner citizen who had lived in the district since the 1870s. He owned the local Beehive Store, was closely associated with the Wesleyan Church, and gave regular picture shows in the local hall using his "magic lantern". He was also the engineer at the Paddy Lackey gold mine at Dark Corner. In 1903 Richard Lean built a car from various bits and pieces of machinery. This car, built at Sunny Corner, is said to be the first built in N.S.W. and possibly the first built in Australia. It was also claimed to be the first automobile to cross the Blue Mountains. Local Sunny Corner folk remembered Dick Lean's car chugging up the main street, billowing clouds of smoke. The car was steered with a lever rather than a steering wheel.





peculiarly sharp acoustic conditions of clear, cold nights, that the sounds of the band playing in Portland could be heard some 10 kilometres distant at Sunny Corner, almost seeming to be an echo of earlier years when the Sunny Corner miners' band played on moonlit nights in the main street of Sunny Corner. Other treats to be had in Portland would be a visit to the Crystal Theatre to see a picture show, and perhaps even a visit to Sophie's Soda Fountain for a lime icecream soda.

On the return journey home from Portland, a stop would always be made to spell the horses. This stop would generally be made at the camp of one of the horse teams which still frequented that route in the 1920s. There would be some friendly yarning around the campfire, and mugs of tea passed around. Even those people who drove cars used to stop for a spell at any campfire they happened to pass along the way. Bullock teams had been phased out by the early 1920s, and horse teams had gone by the early 1930s, being replaced by motor trucks. These days it's a fifteen-minute trip on a tar road to Portland, with no thought of stopping anywhere for a chat.

A trip to Bathurst might take place once a year if one still travelled by horse and sulky. This visit would of course involve an overnight stay, and was always timed to coincide with the Bathurst Show. This was when Sorlie's Vaudeville Show came to town too – their big tent would be pitched near the showground, and artists from Sydney's Tivoli Theatre would be performing. A visit to Sorlie's would be remembered for a lifetime.

Those people with cars could, of course, visit Bathurst more often, and horse drawn transport was rarely used after 1940. Those without transport could catch a ride into town with the mail truck, or from the early 1950s, they could travel on the school bus which took children to high school in Bathurst. There was never any public transport out from Sunny Corner.

Schooldays – school was generally regarded as a real chore, the teachers were strict and swift to use the cane. It was much more pleasant to be out in the bush than inside the classroom reciting times tables. The children were supposed to wear boots to school. Usually the girls did, but the boys tried to avoid it, at least in the warmer months. Col and his brothers walked barefoot to school, following along in the smooth track left by passing wagon wheels. They wore their boots strung around their necks, a good way to save the boots from wearing out! Children left school when they finished at primary school, aged thirteen or fourteen, as there was no bus to the high school until the early 1950s.

Entertainment – There were fortnightly bush dances, tennis every weekend at the school tennis court, and progressive euchre parties held to raise funds for the local school. People could listen to the wireless, if they had one, taking care not to run the battery down too fast. They could read by lamp light, or visit each other for a yarn. Sometimes there would be "surprise parties" (with the hosts always being forewarned!) Up to thirty people might arrive at the chosen house, laden with plates of supper and musical instruments, and a lively get together would result. These occasions were usually alcohol-free, but other sorts of parties took place too, where home-brewed elderberry wine and parsnip wine would be served. These brews were often so potent that the guests didn't make it home until later the next day.

People mostly didn't go away for holidays as they had no transport, or money for that matter. The kids might swim in the farm dam if it was hot

enough, a trip to Manly beach was only a dream. After a snowfall, fox shooting was on, the fox tracks were easy to follow. And if there was enough snow, children would always build a snowman and go tobogganing. On rare occasions there might be a trip to Sydney by train from Lithgow, if one had transport to Lithgow.

The Depression Years – Sunny Corner's population grew by about 300 during the 1930s. The government, in an attempt to get people to leave the cities, offered prospecting tickets to unemployed men. These men would then go to the country, prospecting for gold, and received £1 a week for six weeks from the government for their trouble. The dole was seven shillings and sixpence a week then, so the extra £1 lured many away from the overcrowded cities. Sunny Corner scored a real cross section of the community. There were watchmakers, carpenters, engineers, bootmakers, motor mechanics and plumbers, but there was also a lower and more desperate class and much thieving went on.

Once these people had made the move to the country, they fared much better. Some lucky ones did find some gold. All of them could live on rabbits and blackberries if necessary, and local people provided those who were hard up with vegetables and other handouts.

Dwellings were built everywhere, made out of anything available, flattened kerosene tins, bush poles, old iron and hessian hags. Any ruins of the earlier township must have been raided for building materials.

During the 1930s possums were trapped for their skins, bark was stripped from the black wattle trees and sold to the tanneries, rabbits were trapped by the thousand. People went pea picking and potato digging and timber cutting. Eucalyptus oil distilleries were being run, large vats of eucalypt leaves were boiled up to produce the oil after the leaves were harvested with cane knives.

Many of the people who came to Sunny Corner in the 1930s moved away again when they could find employment. The Second World War too, caused a population movement away from the area. During the war years, local people either joined up, or worked at Lithgow Munitions Factory during the week (the men boarded in hostels there), returning home at the weekends to run their farms. The women too, were called up to work in the factory if they did not have small children to care for. Petrol rationing allowed only four gallons per month per family, food items and clothing were rationed too. A Japanese invasion was expected and the local Volunteer Defence Corps. (V.D.C.) trained at the Sunny Corner Recreation Ground. They comprised a motley assortment of army rejects, but they were all crack shots with a rifle, having all been raised in the bush. They probably would have come off best in any guerilla warfare which might have taken place in the bush around Sunny Corner, and many expected that it would.

Life has changed dramatically since these earlier years. The telephone had come here in the early 1930s, but electricity wasn't connected at Sunny Corner until the 1950s. Most homes were connected about 1954, and this must have caused a revolution in living standards. Refrigeration, lighting, and all sorts of other mod-cons could be had (if one could afford them). Cars were improved and were easier to come by, so people were able to move about more easily. Roads were improved too, and the Sunny Corner road was tarred progressively during the 1950s and 1960s. Television came in the 1960s, another major change, but now taken for granted. At first only Channel 2 from

Sydney could be picked up, and this meant having an enormous aerial. Later the A.B.C. transmission was relayed from Mount Canobolas in Orange, and a second channel (8) began transmission.

Also with the power came washing machines, electric heaters, stoves and hot water systems, water pumps and workshop equipment. Life was made much easier and Sunny Corner is no longer the isolated community it once was.

During the 1980s the town of Sunny Corner and its surrounding areas have had something of a comeback in population. There are about 100 people living here now, the population having doubled in the last twenty years. After 1900 the population had declined slowly down to about 100 or so, and apart from the temporary influx of people during the 1930s, numbers stayed around the fifty to 100 mark. Many larger farms have now been subdivided, and professional people have built their homes on hobby farms. They might run a few sheep or whatever, but are employed as teachers or lecturers, or hold jobs at Wallerawang Power Station or various nearby coal mines. Lithgow and Bathurst can both be reached in just over half an hour in today's modern cars, on much improved roads, so people can commute daily to work from Sunny Corner. And Sydney is just three hours distant by car. Other occupations of local people include forestry workers, farmers, artists and craftspeople. A number of new houses have been built in the town in recent years, with the attraction being cheap building blocks and a relatively peaceful locality.

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### THE STORY OF "SLIPPERY JACK"

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"Slippery Jack" was a bushranger of sorts who roamed for several years in the rugged bushland around Sunny Corner and Palmer's Oakey. He didn't stage any hold-ups however, but lived the life of a recluse, obtaining all his needs from miners' camps and sheep properties then retreating back into the bush again. He was able to evade capture on so many occasions that he was dubbed "Slippery Jack". Had he been but a petty thief, his actions may have been tolerated, but he had the unkind habit of removing a miner's camp totally, leaving nothing for the hardworking miner, no money, no food, no clothing and no shelter. And more importantly, he was said to be a dangerous escapee from the French prison on the island of New Caledonia.

Sergeant Wright of the Sunny Corner police was in charge of the pursuit of "Slippery Jack" and had several encounters with him. In the first of these, Jack had attempted to shoot the sergeant, who was from then on rather cautious in his approaches.

There are many newspaper reports in the Bathurst Free Press and Mining Journal from 1893 to 1896, regarding these encounters, and also the eventual capture of the bushranger.

It seems that "Slippery Jack" had first arrived in the Sunny Corner district in about November of 1892, where he then proceeded on a course of thieving and was eventually sighted at Mount Horrible. The newspaper item is headed "Police Sergeant Wright Encounters an Alleged Desperado". This was in April of 1893. Jack was making his evening meal on the top of Mount Horrible and the sergeant had already received a tip-off as to his whereabouts. Upon his approach, Jack drew out a Bowie-knife and a large revolver and said in a heavy

foreign accent "Come on police! I no frightened! I fight for life!" He then fired at Sergeant Wright but the gun did not go off properly. Wright fired back and missed. Jack then picked up a stone, hitting Wright on the forehead and knocking him unconscious for a moment. A pursuit followed, but Jack escaped into the evening darkness over a rocky terrain. Sergeant Wright was cut and bruised, but he had at least captured the swag of the desperado, and he had a good description of him. He was foreign, perhaps Greek or French, about forty-five years of age, 5 feet 10 inches tall, strong build, very dark complexion, black hair and whiskers of about eight to ten weeks' growth. He was dressed in dark trousers, a brown faded sack coat and a light felt hat. He wore a white cap under the felt hat, and on his feet were a pair of well worn Blucher boots. On his right hand he wore two gold rings, and a scarf around his neck was also fastened by a gold ring. He had a peculiar shrug of the shoulders when he spoke.

All the later sightings of "Slippery Jack" mentioned his great strength – he was tremendously powerful and could steal a 50 pound bag of flour and escape running. The swag which Sergeant Wright had just captured was conveyed to the Sunny Corner Police Station. It weighed an immense 185 pounds – the weight of a very well built man. Most people could not carry such a weight. The swag contained tents, blankets, bags, clothes, two gallons of water in a canvas water bag, billy cans, rations such as hams, potatoes, onions etc., and many other articles. There was also a silver chain, a Swiss watch and an American watch in the swag, obviously stolen.

"Slippery Jack" was again sighted at Meadow Flat in November of 1893, but escaped capture. In August of 1895, "Slippery Jack" raided some miners' huts in the bush near Palmer's Oakey. The miners had been at work and returned home for lunch to find not a trace of food nor clothing remaining in their huts. An amount of gold and silver had also been taken. The miners then had to walk some miles to Mr. C.F. Frank's store at Palmer's Oakey to obtain some more food.

"Slippery Jack" was sometimes glimpsed fleetingly, but he always seemed to be able to evade capture. He was a most able bushman and lived in wild bush country which he knew in every detail. He was able to disappear into the wildest country and to outrun his pursuers. Often he would rob miners' huts just after they had purchased a load of provisions, and the men began to feel that they were being constantly watched. He also stole sheep from nearby properties.

In February of 1896, his camp was discovered, although Jack himself evaded capture. William Aitcheson, a settler living near Clear Creek, was out in the mountains of the Winburndale Range in search of wattle bark which he supplied to the tanneries. While on a high precipice known as Eagle Hawks Nest, looking down towards Palmer's Oakey Creek, he noticed smoke rising from a cavern below him. Upon investigation he found a small patch of nicely cultivated ground and a well camouflaged shelter built of brushwood. Aitcheson quickly retraced his steps and sent a message to Sergeant Wright. The sergeant, accompanied by Sergeant Cromelin of Sunny Corner and also Constable Bond of Sofala, formed a party with Aitcheson and his son, and two young local men named McEvoy. From Eagle Hawks Nest, some ten miles from Palmer's Oakey, they looked down from where Aitcheson had first seen the smoke and they then cautiously began the descent to "Slippery Jack's"



camp. The camp was described as being in a gulch between two high mountains, on a tributary of Palmer's Oakey Creek and about 250 yards from the main road leading from Sunny Corner to Wattle Flat. (This route would be approximately where Eskdale Road runs today – the exact location of Eagle Hawks Nest is unknown). In those times the area was said to be lonely and desolate in the extreme. The camp was surrounded by rocks and could not be seen from 20 yards away.

The party of men approached the camp with great stealth and there they saw "Slippery Jack" in his shirtsleeves, at work in his garden. The police then went forward and asked Jack if he had seen some lost cattle. "Slippery" then ran to his hut and grabbed a gun and attempted to fire, but again the gun misfired and he resorted to the use of well aimed stones. The police fired some shots, but missed, while "Slippery" kept up a constant stream of rocks. He was then able to escape by running off through the bushes. That evening an old miner who lived nearby was robbed of all his possessions; food, clothing and blankets – "Slippery" was again laying in a hoard for his next campsite.

The police were able to closely inspect the hut that had just been deserted. It was built of poles and brushwood and covered with bark. Broken boughs were thrown on the roof as camouflage. The small garden was growing tomatoes, pumpkins, potatoes and other vegetables – the garden tools were made of wood. The hut was full of stolen property and had probably been occupied for about a year. There were articles of clothing, tents, household goods, watches and other items. The police then burnt down the hut, and called for reinforcements.

"Slippery Jack" continued to replenish his stores – he raided Mr. Thompson's sheep station, "Warrie", at Palmer's Oakey, where he stole some calico sheets and some boots before being disturbed. He was seen by Mr. McNamara, the manager of "Warrie", walking along a nearby road. He claimed to be a gold-digger – his clothes were in rags, his boots were worn to shreds and held up with pieces of string and leather. McNamara considered that he looked altogether desolate and not as forbidding as his reputation might indicate.

In March of 1896, Sergeant Atkinson from Lithgow and Constable Scott of Rydal joined the Sunny Corner police contingent in further pursuit of "Slippery Jack". There were now some fifteen or so policemen searching for the fugitive. They searched from Sunny Corner, all through Palmer's Oakey and on up to the Capertee area, where reports of stolen sheep had been received. The search party combed the area around Crown Mountain at Capertee, and around Willewa Creek. For the next two months a game of hide and seek ensued, with the fleet-footed "Slippery" constantly able to elude his pursuers because of his thorough knowledge of the wild country of that area. He continued to raid miners' camps, taking not just food, but the entire camp, tent, clothes and all.

But towards the end of May, 1896, "Slippery Jack" was finally captured. A search party comprising of Sergeant Wright and Constable McConvid of Sunny Corner, Constable Kearns of Rylstone and Constable Preston of Ilford, plus two very able blacktrackers, Hughey from Dubbo and Fred King, set off on foot into the rugged country of Mount Genowlan, near Capertee. "Slippery" had been seen in the area. Sergeant Wright was in charge, and the six men spent many nights camped out, sleeping under their overcoats and mackintoshes, daring not to light a fire. The country on the plateau of Mount Genowlan is wild and beautiful sandstone country, full of sheer cliffs and large

caves, pagoda formations and rivulets, huge tree ferns and magnificent eucalypts, wallabies and lyrebirds.

Early one morning, the police party set off, and accidentally set loose a large rock which rolled over a precipice. Quite unexpectedly, "Slippery Jack" rushed out of a cave just below them. This cave had been entirely hidden by rocks and bushes. "Slippery" bounded away like a deer, but Constable Preston fired a shot from 10 yards away, just before "Slippery" was able to make an escape over a 20 feet drop. The bullet hit him in the thigh, he tried to run off again but one of the blacktrackers tackled him and he was secured with handcuffs. The wound was bad and he was unable to walk, and had to be carried for three miles to the nearest habitation – Mr. Gallagher's house. (This would have been Airly House.) Mr. Gallagher then drove the police and the injured "Slippery" into Capertee Police Station, where Sergeant Wright wired for medical assistance to be ready at Wallerawang. They then took the first train from Capertee to Wallerawang where Dr. Asher from Lithgow was able to remove the bullet from "Slippery's" leg. It had touched the bone in his leg and he was suffering intensely. "Slippery" was then charged with attempting to discharge a firearm at Sergeant Wright, and was sent to the hospital at Bathurst Gaol prior to his court appearance.

It was reported that the mark of leg irons could be seen on his legs, and that truly he was an escapee from New Caledonia who had escaped some five years previously in a boat. While in Wallerawang, "Slippery" spoke to a railway porter before his train trip to Bathurst in the company of several police. The railway porter was Spanish, and this was also "Slippery's" nationality as it turned out. It had been thought that he was Greek, or French, or Italian. He was so pleased to be able to speak in his native tongue that he related the following story to the railway porter. His name was Jean Le Fung and he was a native of the north of Spain. He had been a prisoner in New Caledonia and about five years previously he escaped. He landed at Brisbane and made his way to Toowoomba and thence to Bourke, working on stations when he could obtain employment. About two years were spent in this way, after which he made his way down the river on steamers, and ultimately located himself in the mountain ranges, where he had lived ever since. His recent existence had been rough in the extreme, he had been hunted from place to place and dared not live near any civilization lest his identity be discovered.

"Slippery", by then aged fifty-four, had aged considerably in the years of his pursuit. His hair and beard, once black, were now greying. The court reports state that his name was Jean Le Fung alias John La Rosa, that he was aged sixty-five, and that he was a plasterer from Madrid in Spain.

The camp at Mount Genowlan was thoroughly searched by police, and all the items found were brought to the police station at Sunny Corner where they were displayed in one of the cells. The items filled a room and were carefully listed in an inventory published in the *Bathurst Free Press and Mining Journal* on 6th June, 1896 along with the items that had been found at two other camps. These were:

One bag of flour (about 50lb), one bag of sugar and one of flour, another 50lb. bag of flour, and bag with tea and sugar, another 50lb. bag of flour, one bundle of tobacco leaf, a bundle of clothing, flannels, shirts, etc., two wallaby skins, another bag of flour, a bag of tea, two billies, frying pans, damper, coat, boots, straps, candle, cotton, goloshes and cotton, file, knife,

soap, two pint pannikins, and two pairs miners' pants, one bundle of clothing, another 50lb bag of flour, a bag containing part of a blanket and three water bags, a tucker bag, tobacco leaf rolled, straps, files, spoons, rat-trap, felt cap, hand-bag, shoemaker's awl, more straps, a frying pan, dishes and pannikins, 10 billy-cans, some spoons and a sheath-knife, a caddy containing pipes, an awl, knife, buttons, nails and boot protectors, two pairs boots, patched with nails and leather in a peculiar fashion, three billy-cans, pipe, "twitch;" a bag containing billy can, parcel of mutton cut into small pieces, a bag of sugar, needles, cotton, and sundries, pan of fat, a sheath knife and two table knives, a bag containing sugar, pumpkin seed, bag of flour and parcel of tea, hair brush, two pint pots, bag of nails, scissors, rocksalt, copy of *Black and White* illustrated paper, several bags of cooked mutton cut in small pieces, another bag of blankets and four bags sewn together to form a bed, two shoulder bands for carrying swags, one parcel containing bag of tea, oil-cloth, rags, singlet, socks and handkerchief, a parcel with cord, shirt (patched with flour bag), trousers, black coat, another coat lined with flour bags, shirt, trousers, bag of tin tacks, purse, pants, two shirts and looking glass, fish hooks, leather bag, bag containing cotton, cord etc., gloves and double barrelled gun, revolver, knife, ladies companion, cartridge belt, Waltham hunting watch (No. 2434099), another Waltham hunter (1713446), a Geneva hunter (49745), all with nickle alberts attached, a parcel with cotton, scissors, needles, safety pins, matches, papers, beads with cross, silvermounted pipe in case, one block pipe and leather strap.

This truly astonishing list shows that "Slippery Jack" was a real bower-bird who stole far more than his immediate needs. And there may have been other bush camps that the police never discovered.

In July of 1896, two months after his capture, "Slippery Jack" was charged in Bathurst Court with theft. At Mitchell's Creek in April of 1893, he had stolen all the possessions of Ezbon Eben Pratt, including a loaded revolver, a pair of gloves, a jack-knife, a tent fly and other items. He had also stolen a double-barrelled breach-loading shotgun, cartridge belt, trousers, shirt and other clothing, and a quantity of provisions from Jude Kemp, a farmer of Eusdale Creek near Meadow Flat.

During the various court hearings, "Slippery" required an interpreter as his English was very poor. He must have lived a very lonely life during his years in the bush, with no conversation whatsoever.

John La Rosa alias Jean Le Fung was sentenced in Bathurst quarter sessions on 27th of July, 1896, to five years in gaol. This sentence was commenced in Bathurst Gaol. In October of that year, "Slippery" was again in court, this time he was charged with the malicious wounding of another prisoner in gaol. He was found guilty and sentenced to a further twelve months imprisonment. In evidence given, "Slippery" was said to have looked menacingly at another prisoner, muttering something in Spanish while he drew his finger across his throat. He then lunged at the other man with a knife and attempted to stab him.

"Slippery" was described as having strongly marked features, with eyes deep set under a prominent brow. At times he could look alarmingly fierce but at other times, when something had struck him as being comical, his expression was described as being quite agreeable. He was of a wiry and powerful build, with a large chest measurement and big shoulders and very muscular limbs. Although his age had been put down at sixty-five, he did not look that old.

What became then of "Slippery Jack"? Was he really a dangerous escapee from New Caledonia? In the book, *Ghosts of the Goldfields*, written in 1940 by Henry Neary, a short account is given of "Slippery Jack's" pursuit and capture which is reasonably accurate except that Jack is described as being small and weedy. Neary also states that Jack was sentenced to twelve months in Berrima Gaol, and not five to six years in Bathurst Gaol. Neary says that, while in Berrima Gaol, a police detective entered the gaol for a time to try to find out more about the background of "Slippery". This detective somehow found out that "Slippery" was one of two prisoners who had indeed escaped from New Caledonia after killing two warders. Again, according to Neary, "Slippery" was then sent back to New Caledonia, tried and eventually executed for the offence. He had to be sent in a cage to New Caledonia as he had become wild and difficult to handle.

I cannot find out from police archives if "Slippery" was indeed sent back to New Caledonia and executed as claimed by Neary. But all the early newspaper accounts regarding this man did indicate that there was a general belief in the story of his being an escapee from New Caledonia, so it is quite likely that the story is true.

One wonders then, why "Slippery Jack" was sent to New Caledonia in the first place. He had claimed at one time that he had been in the Spanish army and perhaps he was fighting in France and taken a prisoner. New Caledonia was the French equivalent to Australia's Port Arthur or Norfolk Island, where prisoners were harshly treated. So his solitary years in the Australian bush may have been like a paradise compared with imprisonment in New Caledonia.

Perhaps one day the whole story will emerge. Many families around Sunny Corner and Palmer's Oakey have, in their own family lore, stories about "Slippery Jack", as his thieving ways affected many families in the district.

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**Life after the Mine – 1900 to 1980's**

Mr. & Mrs. C.O. Wilkinson, Sunny Corner  
 Mrs. Iris Collins, Sunny Corner  
 Mrs. Linda Smith, Bathurst  
 Mrs. Nita Magill, Bathurst



## PART III – THE ENVIRONMENT

### ABORIGINAL HISTORY

Little is known of the earliest aboriginal inhabitants of this district. No aboriginals are presently living here. The only indication of their past occupation of Sunny Corner comes in the form of stone axes which have been found, either ploughed up in paddocks or just lying on the surface. It is difficult to date these axes, as the culture which used this style of axe extended over thousands of years, right up to the time when the first white settlers arrived in the 1800s and the aborigines left the area. A corestone found at Yetholme has been verified by the Australian Museum as belonging to a very old culture, the Kartan, a culture which dates back perhaps 30,000 years. No paintings, engravings or stencils have been found in this area. The nearest site where stencils of hands and implements can be seen is in sandstone country to the east, one example being Blackfellows Hands near Wallerawang. In the Thompson's Creek area (near Meadow Flat) is a site where grooves have been worn into a rock face, presumably where spears or implements were sharpened. In Winburndale Nature Reserve (west of Sunny Corner) there are a number of *bora* rings, or stone arrangements. These consist of piles of round stones which have been placed on high and open sites. These arrangements were most likely used in ceremonies. Similar stone arrangements also occur around Bathurst, where they were used in *bora* ceremonies, aboriginal dancers moving in paths through the piles of stones. The last ceremonies around Bathurst were held during the time of early European settlement, but not since.

#### *The Wiradjuris*

The aboriginal tribe which would have encompassed the Sunny Corner area was the Wiradjuri tribe. This was one of the largest tribes in New South Wales, and consisted of an association of smaller groups connected by cultural and social similarities. One distinctive cultural feature of the Wiradjuris was the use of an incised tree at a burial ground, although none of these trees would now remain in the Sunny Corner area. The Wiradjuri group or nation occupied a large oval shaped area bounded by the Great Dividing Range to the east, the Murrumbidgee River to the south, and extending as far west and north as present-day Hay, Nyngan and Gunnedah. The people living in this area all shared the same language.

The smaller groups were known as bands and consisted of several family units perhaps numbering fifteen to thirty. All these people would be related, and they hunted and gathered together in their own recognised hunting ground. Contact with other groups was made during ceremonies, and trading routes linked the groups. Various items were traded, such as weapons, axes, jewellery, food and utensils.

The more easterly groupings of the Wiradjuri people were united under their leader, Windradyne, at the time of European settlement in the Bathurst district. They probably numbered around 700 according to early accounts. (The whole of the Wiradjuri Nation may have consisted of 12,000 people.)

Other tribes occupied areas in the Blue Mountains, Sydney, and in areas to the north, west and south of the Wiradjuri territory. There were hundreds of different aboriginal tribes extending right across Australia.

Prior to European occupation, the Wiradjuri people had lived well, with good supplies of fish, waterfowl, emus and all other kinds of birds and their eggs, kangaroos, possum, wombats, turtles, snakes, goannas, lizards and many different roots and vegetables, seeds and fruits, wild honey and flower nectar. They practised a method of "firestick farming" whereby open areas were periodically burnt off, causing fresh green shoots to sprout and thus encourage grazing animals such as kangaroos. These were speared or caught in nets, as required, for food supply.

The local tribes were well fed and good looking, strong and well proportioned. They spent much time in grooming themselves, they often wore cockatoo feathers in their hair, kangaroo teeth in their ears as decoration, and they oiled their bodies with animal fat, giving them a sleek appearance. In summer they wore little. In winter, they wore cloaks made from kangaroo and possum skins. These skins were scraped clean, sewn together with sinews, and often decorated with incisions of a criss-cross pattern. Bark canoes were constructed for river transportation and fishing, and simple shelters were constructed from sheets of bark and bushes.

Strict laws were enforced by the tribal elders in matters regarding moral and social behaviour. All natural features held a spiritual significance to these people who lived so close to the land. The first accounts by Europeans of their encounters with local natives described them as being timid, harmless and inoffensive, mild and cheerful, often laughing. This is in great contrast to some other aboriginal tribes. In Cape York for instance, the local aboriginals solved the problem of white invaders by eating them. By comparison the Wiradjuris seemed to be a thoroughly good and kindly race of people. They tolerated the first settlers. Part of their code of behaviour was to share lands and possessions. They were prepared to share their hunting grounds with the early settlers, provided that their ceremonial grounds and other special areas were not disturbed. In the first days of white settlement around Bathurst the natives and whites apparently lived in relative harmony, due to the good nature of the Wiradjuri people no doubt. But this was soon to change.

#### *Outline of European Occupation*

After Captain Cook visited Botany Bay in 1770, the English decided to form a colony there for convicts. The first shipment of 750 prisoners arrived in Sydney Harbour on 26th January, 1788, under Captain Phillip. The settlement grew on the east side of the Great Dividing Range, but the Blue Mountains formed a natural barrier which defied attempts by Europeans to find a route through them. More pasture lands were needed by these first white settlers to run their sheep and cattle, and time and time again explorers tried to find a route across the Blue Mountains, hoping for good pastures to the west. So many times they were stopped by the massive and sheer sandstone walls which today attract tourists as spectacular scenery. Finally in 1813, Blaxland, Lawson and Wentworth found a route across the mountains as far as Mount Blaxland (just south of Lithgow today). Later in the same year, assistant surveyor Evans and his party continued on from Mount Blaxland, descended the western slopes

of the Great Dividing Range and followed along the route of the Fish River to the region of Bathurst.

On noting the excellent pastures of the district around Bathurst, Evans so encouraged Governor Macquarie that the decision was made to construct a road across the Blue Mountains. Under William Cox, a road was constructed along the route taken by Blaxland, Lawson and Wentworth. This road extended over 160 kilometres, from the western boundary of the settlement at Emu Plains, to the site of a new settlement at Bathurst. The road was built using convict labour and took less than six months to complete.

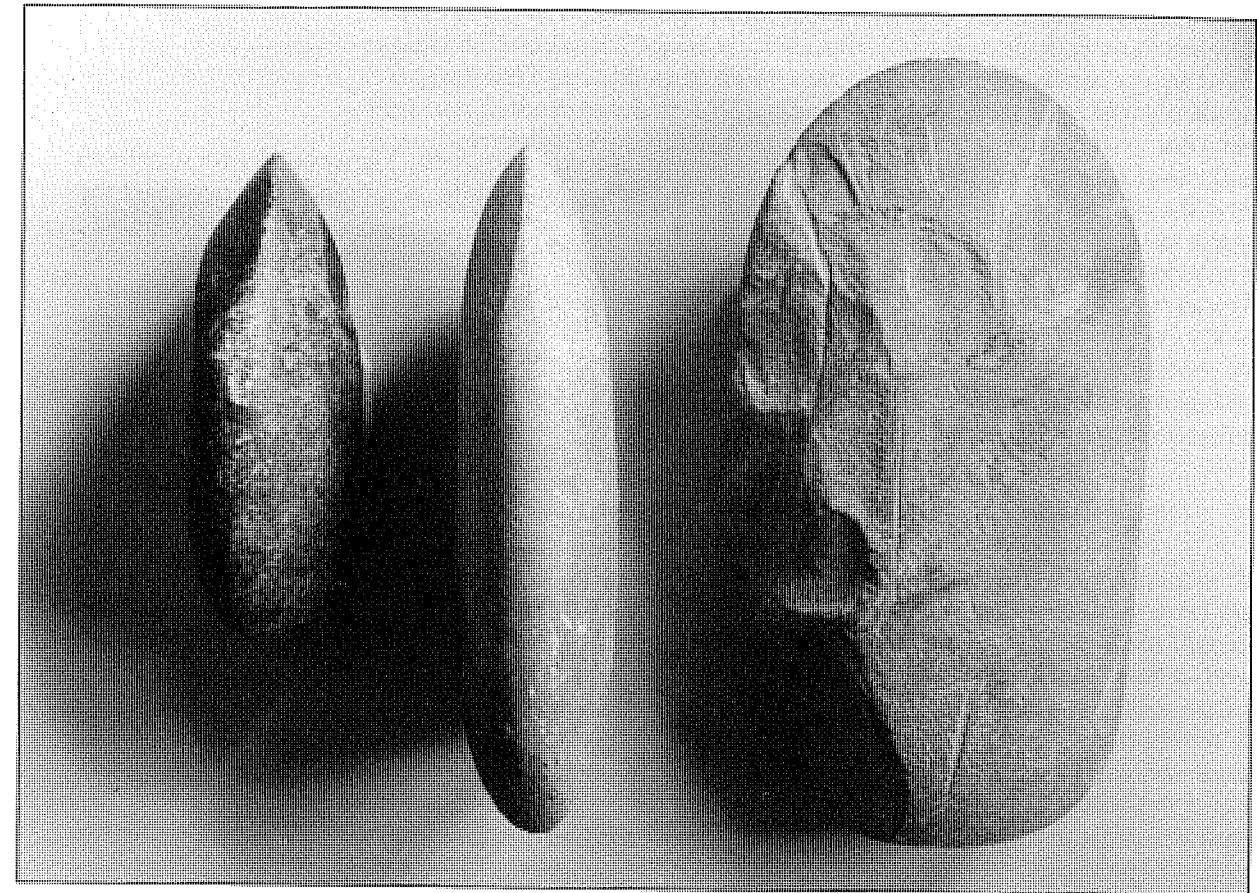
By 1815 a government settlement had been formed at Bathurst, and land grants were made by Governor Macquarie, so that white settlers could run sheep and cattle and grow wheat and potatoes.

As already mentioned, these settlers were tolerated by the local aborigines. But the next stage of settlement came after a ruling that free convict labour could be used on farms, and that land could be easily purchased by anyone. Many more free settlers were lured to Australia from England. They were able to purchase land and work it at little cost with convict labour.

Where land was taken up in the Bathurst district, there was more and more pressure on the Wiradjuri hunting grounds, and much disturbance to the wildlife was caused by the sheep, cattle, dogs and horses of the settlers. The Wiradjuri depended on the wildlife for food, and changes were occurring in the areas where they gathered edible plants. The traditional Wiradjuri hunting grounds had by now been almost completely taken over by white settlers. Being hungry, the Wiradjuri stole sheep and potatoes, which led to white reprisals. The aborigines were shot, or poisoned with arsenic-laced dampers. These dampers were left in stockmen's huts, where the hungry aborigines were likely to steal food. Attacks continued on both sides, the natives began to terrorise the white settlers and attack their flocks, their homes and huts, and spear the stockmen. But spears were no match for the white-man's firearms.

In 1824, martial law was declared by Governor Brisbane, for the area west of Mount York. This meant in effect that the Europeans could shoot as many aboriginals as they pleased, with no fear of white laws. Murder was made legal. During this time of martial law, the population of perhaps 700 aborigines was decimated. Women and children were rounded up and shot like animals. Waterholes were poisoned. It was regarded as a sport to shoot natives.

Windradyne, who was the leader of these local tribes, fought long and hard against the whites, along with the local warriors. Their hunting grounds had been taken over, their waterholes fenced off, their sacred sites desecrated and their women and children murdered. Windradyne himself proved to be most elusive. A reward was offered for his capture. He was known to the whites by the name of "Saturday". Early accounts of Windradyne described him as being immensely powerful, a very well built and handsome man. He wore a beard which was plaited in three sections. He had once been imprisoned for a month by the whites, but during the time of martial law he was never recaptured, and died many years later, in 1835, from gangrene in wounds sustained in a tribal encounter. He is buried at a tribal ground on the property "Bruceedale" at Peel, near Bathurst. Eventually so many aboriginal people had been slaughtered or left the district altogether, that a truce was made. The remaining natives lived out their days on outcamps of the white settlers, sometimes working for them, and receiving handouts of rations, rum, blankets



Aboriginal stone axes, found at Sunny Corner by Col Wilkinson, a local resident.

and tobacco. They were generally looked down on and ridiculed by the white settlers.

The aboriginals would have almost certainly suffered, too, from the effects of introduced diseases, such as smallpox. Why were the aboriginals so callously regarded by the white settlers? One reason was possibly due to the prevailing scientific thought of the day. Europeans tended to regard primitive people worldwide as a definitely inferior species. This trend in thinking developed into an exact science. Skull measurements were carefully analyzed, and the conclusion was reached that aborigines were a transitional type somewhere between ape and man, and definitely sub-human. Charles Darwin held this view when he visited Bathurst in 1836.

One aboriginal massacre occurred near the top of Clear Creek, about nine kilometres from Sunny Corner, in the area known now as Winburndale Nature Reserve. Aboriginal men, women and children were rounded up and driven into the deep gorges there, and shot. There may have been perhaps thirty or more in this group, and they would have represented one of the local bands or family groups.

So, by the time that Europeans and Chinese visited the Sunny Corner area in search of gold in the 1850s, the aboriginal population had long since departed, after a most shameful episode in the history of white settlement of Wiradjuri lands.

## ENVIRONMENT OF SUNNY CORNER

### Historical Summary

The entire district of Sunny Corner was once thickly wooded with eucalypts and acacias, and inhabited by much wildlife. Aborigines also occupied the area.

With European settlement this timber was gradually cleared. At Mitchell's Creek in the 1850s and 1860s, much timber was cut to be used as firewood in the quartz-burning kilns, and Richard Lean described how the whole area around Mitchell's Creek became denuded of timber. A photograph of Mitchell's Creek taken in 1884 verifies this. The Sunny Corner silver mine began operations in earnest in 1884. Timber was used to fuel the open roasting kilns. The firewood was heaped up and the ore was put on top – the heat from the fires drove off sulphur and arsenic which then made the ore easier to smelt. The fumes from the open roasting process, and also those from the smelting chimneys, soon killed off all the remaining vegetation on the mine hill. An early photograph of the Sunny Corner mine shows the mine hill to be well timbered. The whole hillside soon became badly eroded – the erosion scars are still evident today.

The underground workings in the mine were supported by local eucalypts, some props were over a metre thick and even these would splinter under the weight of shifting ground. Old stumps from these huge trees can still be seen in local bushland. A visitor to the underground workings in the 1880s described the supports as being like "a forest of trees".

The oldest trees around Sunny Corner today would be no more than eighty or ninety years old, as by 1900 all the biggest trees had been cut out. There was a stand of giant trees at the old racecourse which would have been some hundreds of years old. They had been retained by the old hands and were much admired by the local townsfolk. Probably the species was *Eucalyptus dalrympleana*. But these trees and the racecourse itself fell victim to Forestry Commission clearing procedures during the 1960s.

In the 1880s and 1890s the town had several sawmills, and timber was also sawn by hand in the bush. First a tree would be felled using a crosscut saw, and then sawn lengthways over a large pit. These pits can still be seen in the bush around Sunny Corner.

During the 1930s pit props were cut for the Lithgow coal mines, using axes. It was not until 1950 that the first chain saw arrived in the district, it weighed a hefty 85 pounds.

In the 1920s and 1930s, a lot of people collected tan bark which was used for the tanning of leather. This was mostly collected from the Dark Corner and Palmer's Oakey areas, and the bark was from the Black Wattle (*Acacia falciformis*). The tree would be felled but not fully severed through, thus keeping the tree off the ground, the bark was then slit lengthways and peeled off and stacked in bundles. The cutter's hands turned black from the stain, and the work was very strenuous. Loads were carried on bullock waggons to the railhead at Piper's Flat.

Also during the 1920s and 1930s, many local people ran eucalyptus oil stills. The Peppermint Gum (*Eucalyptus dives*) was used, and there are few intact

stands of these trees left in Sunny Corner. Those trees that were cut have regenerated as a multi-stemmed form, whereas normally *E. dives* grows with a single main trunk. Many of these multi-stemmed peppermints grow in the flora and fauna area which adjoins the town. The leaves used to make the oil were the coppice (regrowth) leaves, so the trees were first cut down, and when the stumps began to regenerate (which they did readily), the leaves were then harvested with cane knives. The peppermint trees at Sunny Corner were harvested twice. Each distilling plant consisted of several 400-gallon square ships' containers (iron), into which were placed the leaves and a proportion of water, an airtight lid was bolted on and a fire lit underneath. The leaves were then boiled for a day or two, and the oil was collected from the water vapour. A pipe at the top of the tank carried away the water and oil vapour along the length of the pipe, which usually ran about six metres through a cooling dam. This vapour would condense and spill into a bucket. The eucalyptus oil settled on the top of the water and so could be skimmed off.

### How Land was Taken Up

Land was taken up in the following manner – in order to give miners the chance to build a dwelling and fence in some stock, a system evolved that would enable him to claim approximately 20 acres, occasionally up to 40 acres, as a residential area. To be eligible the person would already need to be in possession of a Miner's Right (but not necessarily engaged in mining.) A Miner's Right related to a pegged-out claim, maximum size 10 feet by 10 feet if the ground was high yielding, or a larger area if the area was lower yielding. The holder of a Miner's Right had freehold title to the area so long as it was being mined. To claim a residential area, the holder of a Miner's Right could select any area he fancied of 20 acres. Only one block was allowed per person and if more than one person applied for the same block, a ballot was held. Rental was paid to the Crown and there was a ruling that the landholder had to sleep on that ground at regular intervals. After twenty years the resident could apply for freehold title. (He still had to be in possession of a Miner's Right during the residential area lease period). Residential blocks could be transferred to a new owner who would only pay the cost of any improvements on the block, but the twenty-year waiting period for freehold transfer would begin again.

With the decline of mining activities in Sunny Corner, the locals turned to agriculture. Land was cleared manually, and horses would be used to pull out large tree stumps. Ploughing was initially done with two draught-horses and a single furrow plough, and to cover an acre in an eight-hour day was considered very good going. In about 1913, the going rate to grub out trees was £5 an acre.

### The Town Common

This was an area of land surrounding the township of Sunny Corner. Nearly all mining towns had areas of common ground so that the miners could run their working horse, plus a few goats for milking and meat, and perhaps a cow also. At Sunny Corner sheep were banned as they were said to be too hard on pasture. The common became official around 1890, and was run by a group of local trustees. Agistment was charged by the trustees to those people who ran



stock on the common. The boundaries were rather hazy, but officially the area was 800 acres around the town. Bullock teams camped along the road on the common. Most of the Sunny Corner common was taken over by the Forestry Commission, and the remainder is now a flora and fauna reserve.

### *Fauna of the Sunny Corner area*

Koalas used to live in the Sunny Corner area. Around 1900 or earlier they “fell out of the trees”, and were also found at the bases of trees, afflicted with watery eyes. They were suffering from a disease of some kind which eventually killed them. There are no koalas at Sunny Corner now.

Common Brushtail Possums were once abundant. They were trapped and poisoned in large numbers for their skins. Snares were made from a wire loop fastened to a pole which was propped against the tree hollow where the possum slept. And pollard was laced with cyanide to poison the possums. Trapping and poisoning became illegal but continued unabated. There are not many possums in the area now and their numbers never recovered.

During the 1890s, Jack Martin (a former Dark Corner resident) remembered that there had been the following animals in the area: Grey Kangaroo, Wallaroo, Swamp Wallaby, Scrub Wallaby, Rock Wallaby, Kangaroo Rat, Bandicoot, Tiger Cat, Native Cat, Possum and Native Bear (koala). Of these species, there can still be seen today:- Grey Kangaroo, Swamp Wallaby, Red-necked Wallaby, Common Wallaroo and Possum. The Tiger Cat, Native Cat, Rock Wallaby, Bandicoot, Kangaroo Rat and Koala have all disappeared completely from the area. The Rock Wallaby was shot out completely, with other wallabies in reduced numbers. The Grey Kangaroo is still quite common. During the time 1915-20, the last Kangaroo Rat was seen in the district – it had a nest in a hollow stump of a tree.

Echidnas are still seen in the area, and occasionally wombats are seen, but their numbers seem to have declined even in the last ten years. Some *antechinus* (native mice) still live in pockets of bushland, as do the small glider possums, but neither species is at all common.

Snakes used to be sighted much more often than they are now, most species are either Copperheads or Red-bellied Black Snakes. Occasionally a Tiger Snake is seen, and rarely, a grey coloured snake (species unknown). Blue-tongued Lizards are often seen in warm weather, as are the various skink species, and Mountain Dragons. The larger Bearded Dragon was once seen in this area, but now seems to have entirely disappeared.

These lists of mammals and reptiles is not complete, but it does give some idea of the number of species that were once in the Sunny Corner area. A complete bird list is given elsewhere.

*Feral species* – Some time between 1900 and 1910, the first fox was shot in the area. It was displayed at the front of Bulkeley's Store in the town and caused considerable interest. The fox had followed the rabbit which had arrived some years earlier. Jack Martin shot the first rabbit in Dark Corner in 1897. Rabbit numbers built up to plague proportions and the only method of control was trapping, shooting and poisoning until the introduction of myxomatosis in the 1950s. Feral pigs have only recently become a problem around Sunny Corner, and their numbers are increasing. Domestic and feral cats do untold damage

to smaller native animals and birds, and quite a few feral cats have been trapped or shot in this area. Feral goats have not become a problem (two of them live around the Sunny Corner mine). The introduced rat and mouse live in bush areas as well as in domestic areas. Rats tend to destroy the nests of birds which are close to the ground.

### *Birds found in the Sunny Corner area*

This list has been compiled by the author from observations made over a 10-year period from 1979 to 1989. (b) indicates species known to breed in the area.

Hoary-headed Grebe	Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike (b)
Little Grebe (b)	White-winged Triller
Cormorant	Scaly Thrush (b)
White-necked Heron	Blackbird (introduced)
White-faced Heron	Flame Robin (b)
Rufous Night-heron	Eastern Yellow Robin (b)
Black Duck (b)	Scarlet Robin (b)
Wood Duck (b)	Crested Shrike-tit
Collared Sparrowhawk (b)	Golden Whistler (b)
Wedge-tailed Eagle	Rufous Whistler (b)
Little Eagle (b)	Grey Shrike-thrush (b)
Brown Falcon	Leaden Flycatcher (b)
Nankeen Kestrel (b)	Satin Flycatcher (b)
Stubble Quail (b)	Rufous Fantail (b)
Painted Button-quail	Grey Fantail (b)
Spur-winged Plover (b)	Willie Wagtail (b)
Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo	Spotted Quail-thrush
Gang-gang Cockatoo	Reed-Warbler
Galah	Rufous Songlark
Sulphur-crested Cockatoo	Superb Fairy-wren (b)
King Parrot	White-browed Scrubwren (b)
Crimson Rosella (b)	White-throated Warbler
Eastern Rosella	Brown Thornbill (b)
Pallid Cuckoo	Buff-rumped Thornbill (b)
Brush Cuckoo (b)	Yellow-rumped Thornbill (b)
Fan-tailed Cuckoo (b)	Striated Thornbill (b)
Shining Bronze-Cuckoo (b)	White-throated Treecreeper (b)
Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo	Red-browed Treecreeper (b)
Boobook Owl	Red Wattlebird
Tawny Frogmouth	Noisy Friarbird
Spine-tailed Swift	Yellow-faced Honeyeater (b)
Fork-tailed Swift	White-eared Honeyeater (b)
Kookaburra (b)	Brown-headed Honeyeater (b)
Sacred Kingfisher (b)	White-naped Honeyeater
Rainbow Bee-eater	Crescent Honeyeater (b)
Superb Lyrebird	New Holland Honeyeater (b)
Welcome Swallow (b)	Eastern Spinebill (b)
Tree Martin	Mistletoebird (b)
Richard's Pipit (b)	Spotted Pardalote (b)

Striated Pardalote (b)	Magpie-lark (b)
Silvereye (b)	Dusky Woodswallow (b)
Goldfinch (introduced) (b)	Grey Butcherbird
House Sparrow (introduced) (b)	Australian Magpie (b)
Red-browed Firetail Finch (b)	Pied Currawong (b)
Diamond Firetail Finch	Grey Currawong (b)
Double-barred Finch	Australian Raven (b)
Common Starling (introduced) (b)	Little Raven
White-winged Chough (b)	

### *Historical bird list for the Sunny Corner – Yetholme area*

Compiled from information given by John Bland, long-time Yetholme resident.

*Bird species which have disappeared completely from this area:*

White-browed Woodswallow	Hooded Robin
Musk Lorikeet	"Skylark"
Greenfinch	Barn Owl
Zebra Finch	"Screech Owl"
Plum-headed Finch	Banded Plover
Speckled Warbler	Curlew (Bush Thick-knee)
White-fronted Chat	Whistling Eagle

*Bird species very much reduced in number:*

Dusky Woodswallow	Spotted Quail-thrush
Starling	Restless Flycatcher
Eastern Rosella	Willie Wagtail
Double-barred Finch	Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike
Diamond Firetail Finch	Grey Butcherbird
Spotted Pardalote	Grey Currawong
Striated Pardalote	Rufous Songlark
Mistletoebird	Richard's Pipit
Silvereye	Pallid Cuckoo
Yellow-faced Honeyeaters (once seen in large flocks in their hundreds)	Fairy Martin
White-eared Honeyeater	"Swifts"
White-naped Honeyeater	Tawny Frogmouth
Noisy Miner	Boobook Owl
Noisy Friarbird	Dollarbird
Red Wattlebird (shot in their thousands around 1900, for export as a food item)	Common Bronzewing
	Nankeen Kestrel
	Brown Falcon

*Bird species which have remained stable in numbers:*

Pied Currawong	Kookaburra
Crimson Rosella	Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo
King Parrot	Galah
Eastern Spinebill	White-faced Heron
White-browed Scrubwren	White-necked Heron
Grey Fantail	Little Grebe
Rufous Whistler	Black Duck
Golden Whistler	Wood Duck
Welcome Swallow	

*Rare vagrant, once seen but not now*

Channel-billed Cuckoo

*Other*

Glossy Black-Cockatoo – flocks of about 20 were regularly seen until about 1930, according to Col Wilkinson of Sunny Corner. His family had several of the spectacular red tail feathers on display in their home.

Satin Bowerbird – bowers made in Sunny Corner in 1915-20, as remembered by Mrs. Maisie Abbott, now of Ryde, N.S.W. The nearest bowerbirds to Sunny Corner now are at Portland.

*Possible causes of species demise*

1. Introduction of foxes early 1900s. At the turn of the century there were many curlews in the area. These are ground-nesting birds, and foxes completely wiped them out. Jack Martin remembered the mournful cry at twilight of "hundreds of curlews" in the Dark Corner area in the 1890s. All ground-nesting birds have been seriously affected by either foxes or cats.
2. Extensive clearing of habitat and nesting areas.
3. Poisoning with 1080 has affected birds of prey, as has shooting.

### *Vegetation of the Sunny Corner area*

A complete list of plant species has not yet been compiled for this area. However, the following list gives all of the native endemic tree species which can be found in Sunny Corner in 1989.

*Trees*

- Eucalyptus aggregata* (Swamp Gum)
- E. dalrympleana* (Candle-bark, Mountain Gum)
- E. dives* (Broad-leaved Peppermint)
- E. fastigata* (Blackbutt)
- E. macrorrhyncha* (Red Stringybark)
- E. mannifera* (Brittle-jack)
- E. pauciflora* (Snow Gum, Scribbly Gum)
- E. rossii* (Scribbly Gum, Brittle-jack)

## Trees (continued)

- E. rubida* (Candle-bark)
- E. stellulata* (Black Sally)
- E. viminalis* (Manna Gum, Candle-bark)
- Acacia falciformis* (Black Wattle)
- Acacia melanoxylon* (Hickory or Blackwood)
- Acacia dealbata* (Silver Wattle)
- Banksia marginata*
- Exocarpos cupressiformis* (Native Cherry)
- Exocarpos stricta* (Native Cherry)

## Orchids

Many ground orchids have been noted in the area, and the following is an incomplete list, giving the known species.

- Gastrodia sesamoides* (Potato Orchid, Cinnamon Bells)
- Dipodium punctatum* (Hyacinth Orchid)
- Chiloglottis gunii* (Common Bird Orchid)
- Pterostylis coccinea* (Brownhood)
- Pterostylis* sp. - various (Greenhood)
- Eriochilus cucullatus* (Parson's Bands)
- Corybas fimbriatus* (Fringed Helmet Orchid)
- Caladenia* sp. (pink)
- Calochilus* sp. (Bearded Orchid)
- Spiranthes sinensis* (Ladies Tresses)
- Diuris pedunculata* (Golden Moths)
- Diuris maculata* (Donkey Orchid, Leopard Orchid)
- Microtis* sp. (Onion Orchid)
- Prasophyllum* sp. (Leek Orchid)
- Thelymitra* sp. (Sun Orchid)

## Other Native Plants

Sunny Corner is not particularly rich in wildflowers, but the following incomplete species list will give some idea of the smaller flowering plants of the area.

- Wahlenbergia* sp. (Bluebells)
- Goodenia* sp.
- Parahebe* sp. (Speedwell)
- Stackhousia monogyna* (Candles)
- Epacris* sp. (Prickly Heath)
- Leucopogon* sp. (Bearded Heath)
- Pimelea* sp. (Rice Flower)
- Lomatia*, two species (small shrub)
- Patersonia* sp. (Purple Iris)
- Thysanotus* sp. (Fringed Lily)
- Stylidium* sp. (Trigger Plant)
- Hibbertia* sp. (Guinea Flower)
- Pomaderris* sp. (tall shrub)
- Viola* sp. (Wild Violet)
- Dianella* sp. (Blue Lily)
- Stypandra* sp. (Blue Lily)

## Other Native Plants (continued)

- Indigophera australis* (Native Indigo) (shrub)
- Hovea* sp.
- Hardenbergia violacea* (False Sarsparilla)
- Glycine clandestina* (Twining Glycine)
- Davisia latifolia* (Bitter Hops) (small shrub)
- Dillwynia* sp. (Yellow Pea-flower)
- Pultenea* sp. (Yellow Pea-flower)
- Drosera* sp. (Sundews)
- Baeckea* sp. (Tea Tree) (small shrub)
- Centaurium* sp. (Pink Sentry Plant)
- Various daisy species, including many yellow and purple varieties, everlasting and "policeman's buttons".
- Various native grasses and sedges
- Ferns, including bracken, tree-ferns, maidenhair and various fishbone-type ferns, and others.
- Fungi, many interesting species including a luminous one.

## Introduced Species

There are two introduced species which have become difficult to control, namely blackberries and pine trees (*Pinus radiata*). In the last twenty years, pine seedlings have begun to spread widely in bushland and open natural areas. The seeds have spread both from old existing pines and from the vast pine plantation areas of this district.

Blackberries:- The first blackberry plants in this area were introduced by Fergie Smith who lived at Dark Corner. In about 1900 he had obtained three plants to grow in his garden. Two plants died but the third survived, and Mr. Smith refused to give cuttings to the envious locals. But by the 1920s seeds had been spread by birds and animals and the blackberry had become a curse in the district.

Pine trees:- Australian forests started the first pine plantation in the district in the vicinity of the present Kirkconnell Prison Farm. It was later owned by Australian Paper Mills, and then purchased by the Forestry Commission in the 1950s. Since that time, the Forestry Commission has greatly expanded their *Pinus radiata* plantation to include a large area of Yetholme, Sunny Corner and Dark Corner. In their early efforts to establish an extensive softwood plantation in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, considerable bad feeling was caused due to the methods used. Forestry policy has now changed somewhat, and good public relations are seen as important. But much damage was done at the time.

To obtain land in the Sunny Corner area, nearly all the existing crown land was taken over by the commission. Some of it had been held as leasehold by local farmers, who were making a living in running stock or growing crops. These leases were compulsorily taken over by the Forestry Commission as they expired, and many local people could no longer make a living at farming and were forced to leave the district. Other areas that were still native bushland were bulldozed flat, the timber was then pushed up into heaps and burnt. Timber was bulldozed into creeks, and steep hillsides were cleared. Extensive 1080 poisoning was then done for rabbit control but this also had a bad effect on wildlife, especially birds of prey such as wedgetail eagles. There was also once a policy of shooting kangaroos which were considered to



trample the pine seedlings.

Wombats, too, were considered to be pests, and they were caught in dingo traps because they made holes in the wire-netting fences which surrounded the pine plantations.

No plant or animal species lists were ever compiled before the clearing took place and no environmental impact study was ever made. It is not known how many local species were lost. No representative areas of vegetation were intentionally left.

Forestry policy today states that in areas to be cleared, a narrow corridor of natural timber must be left along creeks, and that steep hillsides should not be cleared.

The Forestry Commission holds an area of 20,535 hectares in the Sunny Corner-Dark Corner-Yetholme region (50,700 acres). Of this, 8,004 hectares are planted to *Pinus radiata* and 17 hectares to other pine species (approximately 20,000 acres).

#### Flora and Fauna Reserve

There are some remnant areas of natural vegetation just to the north of the town and adjoining the town boundary. These areas were once part of the Sunny Corner Common, and are now preserved due to local interest. The reserves at Sunny Corner include: Department of Lands Reserve No. 91074 for Preservation of Native Flora and Fauna; Department of Lands Reserve No. 91075 for Preservation of Historic Site and Buildings. Seven local trustees were appointed 1st October, 1984 to look after both these reserves. The school residence and adjoining six acres were added to the reserves in December, 1984. The area of these reserves totals about 600 acres (243 hectares).

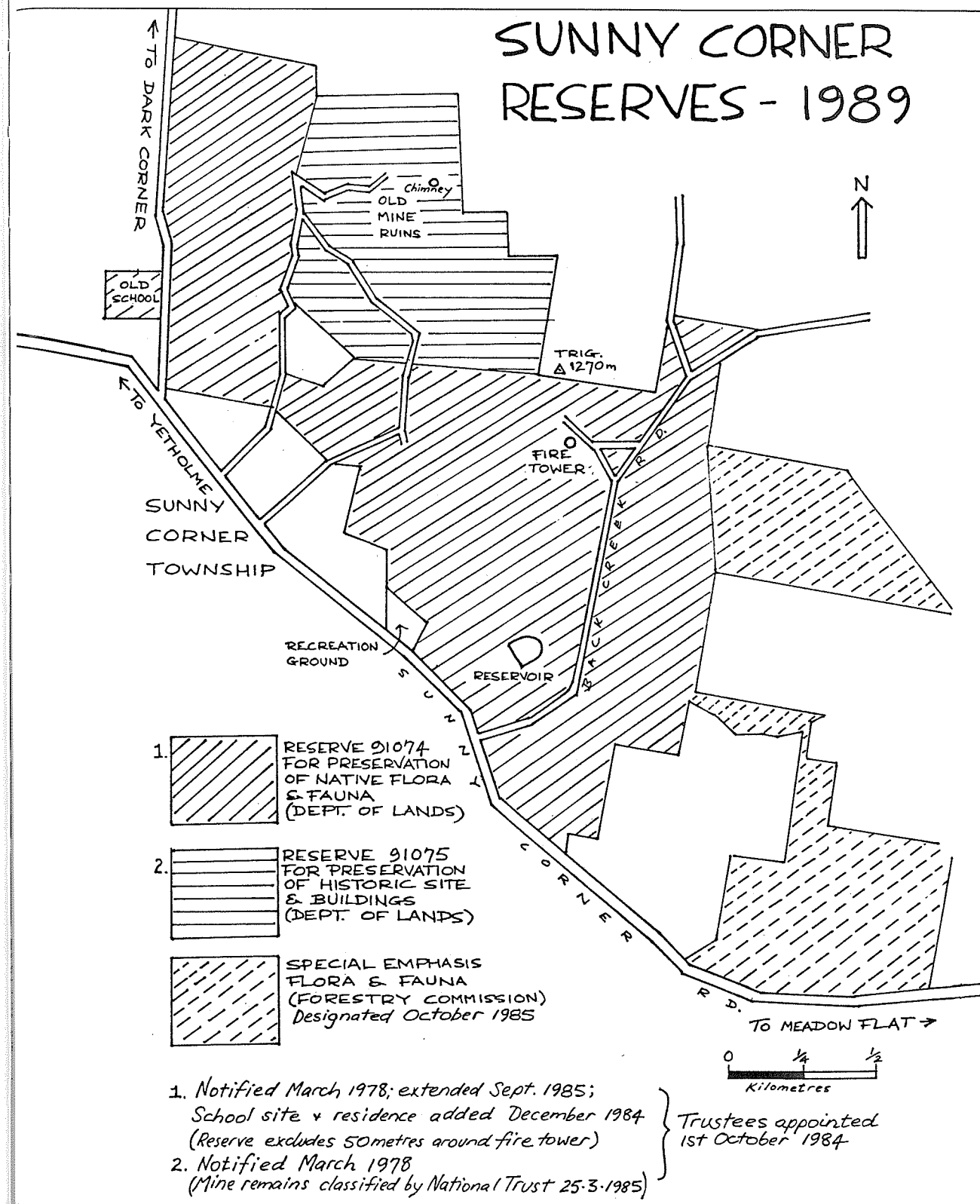
Areas shown on the map (p. 193) as Special Emphasis Flora and Fauna - Forestry Commission, were designated as such by the commission in October 1985 due to local interest in preserving the habitat of the ground orchid *Chiloglottis gunnii*. However, local people are unable to participate in the management of these areas. (Area approximately 160 acres.)

There is also a remnant stand of Blackbutts (*Eucalyptus fastigata*), known locally as Lowe's Bush, situated about 350 metres south-east of the Back Creek Road turn-off. This beautiful stand of timber was saved by local agitation many years ago, during the 1960s, when these trees were to be bulldozed by the Forestry Commission and replaced with pine trees. Lowe's Bush is still under Forestry Commission control and is not well cared for.

Other areas of natural timber that survive around Sunny Corner are either on private property, or in areas held by the Forestry Commission.

#### Recreation Reserve and Tennis Court

Other public reserves at Sunny Corner include the Recreation Reserve. This area was originally the town's cricket ground and is now used for picnicking and camping. School sports were regularly held here until the closure of the school in 1979. The adjoining tennis court was first opened in 1897 and was in use until the 1950s. It fell into disrepair and became so overgrown that it completely disappeared from view. The tennis court, however, re-emerged in 1984 when a group of interested local people restored it to a playable condition and formed a tennis club.



*Revoked Reserves*

These include a large area of the original town common which lay to the south of the Sunny Corner road (see also pages 185-6), and the Sunny Corner racecourse (see also pages 184 and 206). Both these areas were taken over by the Forestry Commission and planted with pine trees. Much of the common was taken over in 1927 but was not planted until the 1960s. The racecourse (100 acres) was taken over by the Forestry Commission in the early 1960s after efforts by local townspeople to retain this area had failed.

All the public reserves of Sunny Corner as at 1989 are shown in the map on page 193.

*Sources of Information for Part III – The Environment*

*Windradyne of the Wiradjuri*, Salisbury and Gresser 1971

*Windradyne, a Wiradjuri Koorie*, Mary Coe, 1986

*A Hundred Years War*, Read, 1988

John Bland, Kirkconnell

Col Wilkinson, Sunny Corner

Jack Martin, unpublished memoirs (Martin family, Dark Corner)

Various newspaper reports on Sunny Corner mine

## PART IV – STORIES

## TALES AND CHARACTERS OF SUNNY CORNER

By Col Wilkinson

*Introduction*

I was about three or four when my family moved to Sunny Corner from Hampton. This was in about 1918 or 1919. My uncle was doing some work at the old silver mine and my father was helping him, so that's why we moved here. I've lived most of my life at Sunny Corner and I'm seventy-four now.

These stories come from various sources. Some incidents I was involved in personally and other stories have come from listening to the conversations of others. In my younger days there was always a lot more conversation than there is now. There were no radios or televisions, and the main entertainment in the homes and camps was conversations. Some of those old story tellers were really good, and the way they could tell a story made a lasting impression on your mind. There was no doubt that they exaggerated a little, but this only added to the spice of the story and I don't think it did any harm as long as the basic facts were correct, which they usually were, or at least they had some foundation. There were times also when you later found out that the story was much truer than you at first thought it to be. Old Dry Scott's story about Paddy Lackey falls into this category.

*Paddy Lackey*

Old Paddy Lackey was a small man. He was only about five feet two inches in height. When Paddy Lackey died in the 1880s, Dry Scott was just a lad. Paddy died at the pub where there was a tremendous spree going on. Whether Paddy was involved in the spree and whether this was a contributing factor to his death I am only left to assume. Some of the grog then was pretty potent stuff and you had to be in fairly sound health to stand the effects of it. His fellow revellers carried poor Paddy out and they laid him out and measured him up for the coffin. Then they sent Dry down to the undertaker to order the coffin with the measurements written on a piece of paper. When the undertaker opened the piece of paper it had seven foot two inches written on it. He said to Dry they were mad – there never was a man of this size that he had ever heard of and in any case Paddy was only a small man. Dry conveyed the message back that they were to remeasure Paddy. By this time the men were in a much worse condition, as they had been drowning their sorrow at Paddy's sudden departure. They said they are not going to measure him again as they had done it carefully the first time. If the undertaker did not want the job they would get someone else to do it. Dry took the message back to the undertaker – the measurement was correct, and did he still want the job? The undertaker got into a rage and said alright, he'd make it for the damned fools if that was how they felt.

So Dry said he made the coffin and when they put old Paddy in they had to put pillows in the ends to take up the extra space and keep him steady. They

had all sobered up a bit by this time of course, and wondered what had gone wrong with the measurement. They then found that the measuring tape had two foot off the end of it. It was too late then to correct it, they said, and in any case it would not do any damage. When they tried to get it into the hearse it was too long and they could not get the doors shut so they loaded it onto Dry's cart and told him to lead off and they would follow. Dry said he had a young horse in, and the cart was light-on and this upset the horse and he bolted. Dry kept him headed the right way but he left the mourners so far behind that he said he had time to boil the billy before they arrived.

I always thought that this was a good tale but a product of Dry's imagination, but many years later I was in the Kirkconnell cemetery and came across Paddy Lackey's grave. It was the longest grave that I have ever seen. I stepped it out and there is no doubt that it would hold a seven foot coffin, so apparently the tale was basically true. Dry may have polished it up a bit but the facts were correct.

Paddy Lackey discovered the best gold mine in this district. This was at Dark Corner and was named after him. Actually his name was Paddy Lahy, but he was always known as Paddy Lackey. However, the name on his tombstone is Lahy, and anyone wishing to check on this can easily find his grave in Kirkconnell cemetery.

Although Paddy Lackey discovered the Paddy Lackey mine, I don't think he made much out of it. He didn't have enough money to develop it and put much machinery on it. He sold out to a group of men for a very low figure. The crowd that bought it made a lot of money and some of them ended up fairly wealthy. Not that it did them much good as the mine was poorly ventilated and very dusty and they all ended up with dusted lungs, or miners' complaint as it was called. None of them lived to be old men, but some of them left a lot of money in real estate when they died, so at least their families benefitted.

### *Dry Scott and his Bullock Team*

Old Dry Scott was a great celebrity in the district and was widely known. His name was really Drysdale Scott but everyone called him Dry. Dry started off with nothing and then got into carting with bullock teams. Then he bought and leased land all over the district and eventually became a big landowner. He was fairly wild as a lad, and he was a big strong chap too, even when he was old. He looked a bit like one of his working bullocks and must have been nearly as strong as one.

Once he was down along the Turon River looking for some horses that he had lost. There were a lot of Chinamen working for gold on the river at this time. Many of the Chinese could not speak English and they lived and worked pretty hard. Chinese, in those days, did not rate very high on the citizenship scale and they were fair game for anyone.

Dry came across one of them working on the river, and asked him if he had seen any horses. The chap could not speak English so he could not understand Dry, and Dry could not understand him. Dry grabbed him and threw him into the river and said that would teach him to learn English. The river was fairly deep and the poor chap could not swim. His terrified yells and screams every time he got his head above water brought a mob of his mates tearing up. They pulled him out about half drowned. Eventually they reported it to the police



*Drysdale Scott. Photo courtesy Martin family, Dark Corner*

at Sofala and Dry was summonsed for assault. When the case came before the court they had engaged a Chinese interpreter. Dry gave a detailed account to the interpreter in the type of language that was supposed to be the way you spoke to Chinese – "I walkee along river. I go speakee to this man. He runnee up to me, etc. etc." After a long winded account in this fashion, Dry shouted at the interpreter, "You savvy what I say?" The interpreter looked at Dry and said, "I understand you perfectly Mr. Scott". It took the wind right out of Dry's sails. The Chinese interpreter could speak English much better than Dry. Dry was fined a small amount, I believe, but not nearly as much as if it had been a whiteman that he had nearly drowned.

During my first years at school, old Dry Scott and his brother Tom used to cart wattle bark through from Dark Corner to Piper's Flat on bullock wagons. Wattle bark was quite an industry then as tanneries used it almost solely for tanning. It must have been frightfully hard work stripping it as it took a devil of a lot to make a ton, as it was well dried out before it was carted. They used what they called Black Wattle, which had a rough, thick bark. The idea was that they only cut the tree on one side, so that when it fell the butt of the tree rested on the stump and kept the barrel of the tree off the ground. The bark was then opened with the axe and stripped off. Usually the wattle grew on steep hillsides where it had to be carried some distance to where a wagon could be loaded. So the bark was made into bundles of about a hundred weight each and the cutters carried this to the wagon. Sometimes this bark had to be carried for several hundred yards and it was very rough on the shoulders. In addition to this the tannin from the bark stained the cutter's hands nearly black and it would not wash off, but had to wear off and this took a long time.

I think that they used to have about four tons on a wagon, which was pulled by about twelve or fourteen bullocks. We used to love to see them approaching the school about the time we were to be let out, as we could then walk along with them. They travelled very slow but it was great fun to escort them along the road. We used to walk alongside and watch Dry or Tom using their whips. Not that they hit the bullocks much. It was mainly to guide them. Those whips were huge things and would have been about twelve to fourteen feet long with a handle about five-and-a-half feet long. They used both hands on the handle. They could really crack those whips and if you were close it was like a small cannon going off.

There was what we used to call "the new road" down below the school where they had cut the road along a steep hillside. They had a post and rail safety fence above the drop over the side, and we used to sit on this and watch the bullock teams go past. A number of us were sitting on this fence one day and one of the kids, George Strickland, was giving old Tom a good bit of cheek about something.

Old Tom came around with his whip, whirled it around and CRACK, right in front of Strickie's face. It sounded like a tremendous explosion and Strickie thought his head was knocked off. He let go the rails, went over backwards and rolled down the hill. It took some time to get his hearing back to normal. We regarded old Tom with a lot more respect after that.

The teams used to camp not far from our place. I don't think they carried any feed for the bullocks. The bullocks were just turned out to graze at night. They used to put a number of big bullock bells on them so they could find the bullocks easily in the morning. The bells were large, deep toned bells and you



could hear them from a long distance away, going “ding dong, ding dong” throughout the night. The only ones they did not put bells on were the ones they put in some unsuspecting land-owner’s paddock to eat his grass. Old Dry was a real artist at this. I remember when my father had a couple of acres of oats up in the top paddock that he was very proud of. The bullock teams camped up on the road one night, and when my father saw his oat paddock the next morning, it was all eaten off and there were bullock tracks all over it. They had put the bullocks in after dark and taken them out before daylight. The bullockies were early risers. They had to be or some irate land-owner would fill them or their bullocks up with buck-shot.

We used to like it when the wagons were coming back empty about the time we were leaving for school. We used to ride on the wagons. We only had about a mile-and-a-half to get to school, but it took a long time as the bullocks were very slow. On these occasions we generally got to school late and we got into trouble about this. However, we accepted this as one of the hazards of enjoyment and we reckoned it was worth it as it was beaut riding on the wagons. You would watch the massive wheels turning slowly, with their shining iron tyres. Sometimes we would walk alongside and toss small stones under the wheels to see them crunched up. It took a solid stone not to be smashed into fragments. Those wheels must have weighed a lot, even without the weight of the wagon. A lot of the roads were rough blue-metal, and the wagons crushed the loose stones of the surface and ground them in and created a very solid foundation. This was proved when much later, these roads were bitumen coated. Only a very thin layer of bitumen was used but it was rare to find any potholes.

The bullocky’s life must have been a hard one. They walked beside the team all day, in rain and snow and wind. They camped at night, very often with wet blankets and they lived out of a tucker box on corned beef and damper or stale bread.

Later, motor trucks came in and replaced the teams. The trucks were much more efficient but not nearly as spectacular and we did not enjoy them nearly as much as we did the bullock wagons. Tom Ferguson was the first I remember to cart wattle bark by motor truck. He had a big truck for those days. It carried about two tons, I think, or a bit less perhaps. He would go whizzing through with his load and you’d hear him disappearing away in the distance. We had no contact with him like we had with the bullock teams and it took all the fun out of the wattle bark carting for us.

### *Mr. Pye*

When the teams were operating, they used to camp near old Pye’s place, which was next door but one to our place. Old Pye was an ex-policeman and bought the small property when he retired. He was the most cranky man that I ever remember. His wife and family had walked out and left him and I did not blame them in the least for this. I think he was naturally a cantankerous man and I suppose that all his years in the police force had made him worse as police in those days had a good bit of authority and many of them acted like little dictators and got away with it. Old Pye had a most bossy attitude. You could not tell him anything. He would contradict you flatly. He bought a windmill at one time and where it was to be erected was in good view from our place.

The tower was laid out on the ground and assembled and then the wheel was put on. Then Pye asked Jack Stait would he pull this windmill up. Jack lived not far from Pye and he had teams and was a very good horseman. Jack Stait was a very practical man and had had a lot of experience of shifting all sorts of loads with horses. The tower of the mill was about thirty feet high. Jack brought down three good draught horses which he knew would have ample power to pull the mill up. When he got there, Pye had a number-eight fencing wire attached to the mill and he told Jack to hook his horses onto this. Jack said, “Mr. Pye,” (we were all pretty polite to Pye and called him Mr. Pye, not that this made him any more polite to us), “Mr. Pye, that wire is not strong enough”. Pye said, “Rot! Of course it is strong enough!” Jack said, “It won’t stand the pull of three horses – it will break”. Pye said, “It is plenty strong enough. If you knew anything you would know that number-eight wire has a breaking strain of three thousand pounds. The mill only weighs fifteen hundred pounds so it is plenty strong enough. Are you frightened that your damned horses cannot pull the thing? They must be pretty poor horses! Hook onto the wire I tell you! That is what I got you here for!” So we watched as Jack led the horses around into position and hooked them onto the wire. He then started the horses ahead gently.

The windmill began to rise. It must have been nearly half way up when we saw the horses suddenly surge forward. The windmill seemed to remain poised in the air for a second or two, and then it crashed back to the ground with a frightful noise. In spite of what Pye had said, the wire had broken. Anyhow the mill was fairly badly bent up and Pye worked on it for a long time to carry out all the repairs. He later somehow got the mill upright. I can’t remember how he did this. Probably put on stronger wires, I expect. I must have been at school for the second episode, as had I been at home I would not have missed it for the world.

### *Sheridan and Ryan*

Pye was a great friend of Sheridan, who was the policeman at Sunny Corner, and Ryan, the school teacher. Sheridan and Ryan were a shrewd pair and they were always cattle dealing. They had a very nice Jersey cow that Pye took a fancy to. He went to them and tried to buy it, and although he offered them a good price of £16, Sheridan and Ryan did not want to sell. Pye was quite upset as he had his heart set on that cow. Anyhow, a couple of days later, Ryan went down the paddock to look at the cow and she was dead. Ryan went back and told Sheridan and they had a bit of a conference about it. They put a lot of thought into what they should do. Finally they sent for old Pye. They told him that they had given further thought to the selling of this cow. As Pye was such a good friend of theirs, and was so anxious to buy the cow, they would be wrong not to sell it to him. Pye was delighted and paid over the money. Ryan said, “of course the cow may be dead for all I know as I have not seen her for a few days.” But Pye was not worried as he had seen the cow looking very well just the week before.

The receipts were made out and the transaction completed. They then went down to get the cow and unfortunately Mr. Pye’s cow was dead. Ryan and Sheridan were very sorry for Mr. Pye, losing a cow like that, but they had told him that for all they knew the cow may have been dead. They felt so sorry for

Mr. Pye that they sold him another cow, cheap. It was a milking cow, and he could have it for just £8. This of course was on top of the £16 he had already paid. Pye bought the cow, but it turned out to be quite wild and could kick like a threshing machine so he was unable to milk it.

We used to be pleased that Ryan, our school teacher, was interested in cattle as it often got us out of some school work. At that time there was a vast area of open ground that was known as the common. On the common there were sections of open grass land and big areas of bush, with creeks and gullies. It was quite natural that cattle often strayed into the gullies in the bushland and were hard to find. Sometimes Ryan would have one missing. He would ask, "Have any of you boys seen a red heifer, with white hind feet and a white star on her forehead", or some other description. We always took particular notice of the description of the missing animal so that we could repeat it back to Ryan at a suitable time. There was my brother Lance, and Ben and Abbie Sharp and sometimes Ron Kissell. When it came a beautiful sunny day, we would tell Ryan that a couple of days ago we had seen a red heifer, with a description that tallied exactly with the description Ryan had given us, away down Daylight Creek. If it was a valuable animal Ryan would say, "Would you boys like to have a look for it?" So we would be out of school as quick as possible before he had a chance to change his mind. We'd grab our dinner bags as we went, and then headed over the hill down towards the creek. Of course, once we got out of sight we forgot about the cow, but we would give Ryan a most detailed account of the tracks we had seen and which way they went and how old they were, so it would make it good for next time. It was beautiful out in the bush. The skies were blue and the birds were singing and you'd see roos and wallabies and rabbits and sometimes a fox. There were beautiful areas of bush around here once, but now there are too many pine trees. It was good in those days, being out in the bush. Much better than being in school. On a nice day I used to sit in school and look out through the window and see the butterflies going past and the birds flying around and the leaves on the trees glistening and I used to long for the time when I could get out.

### *Farrelly*

After Ryan left, the next schoolteacher was a chap called Farrelly. Farrelly was an Irishman and he frightened the daylighters out of us. We thought he was mad. He had fairly bad rheumatism and he used to jump up and down with rage which only made matters worse. His opinion of us as pupils was not very flattering. He said that we were all descended from convicts and that a lot of the pupils were inbred so he could not expect much from us. I don't think that he taught us much as we were too terrified of him. We were not sorry when he left.

### *Calderbank*

Farrelly was replaced with a chap called Calderbank. Calderbank and I developed a mutual dislike for each other. I was about thirteen at the time and I only had about twelve months of schooling to go before I could leave school. So great was the tension between myself and Calderbank that I left the school at Sunny Corner and went to the one at Meadow Flat which was three miles away. Mr. Barton was the teacher there and we got along very well. But I couldn't forget

Calderbank. My brother Lance and I used to go up to the school teacher's residence where Calderbank lived to lob rocks on the roof. There was a patch of scrub near the house, and from here we would let go a succession of rocks. We would each get about three rocks into the air before the first ones hit. The sound of so many rocks landing on an iron roof in quick succession makes a frightful noise. The lights always went off inside the house when we did this, and we generally left then, although we sometimes returned for another go.

One bright moonlight night we went up and started to lob rocks on the roof. The lights went out, but we were waiting for a second go. Then Calderbank came outside and we could see that he had a rifle as the moonlight was glinting on the barrel. I wanted to leave but Lance thought we should stay for another session. Calderbank kept weaving his way towards us, and leaning forward and looking. We were standing in a deep shadow under some trees. Finally he was about fifteen feet from us, still leaning forward and peering into the darkness.

I thought he would hear my heart beating, thump, thump, thump, it seemed to be making a hell of a noise. Lance always seemed to be able to do the right thing at the right time. Just as the situation became critical and Calderbank must have reckoned it was us in the shadow of the trees, Lance let out a frightful yell. Calderbank jumped about two feet in the air and nearly dropped the rifle. We shot back into the scrub and disappeared into the night, with Calderbank yelling after us, "I'll put a bullet in you! I'll put a bullet in you!" Lance wanted to go back and have another go but I reckoned we had tested our luck far enough for one night. This episode did not stop us from lobbing rocks on his roof, but it did make us a bit more cautious on future excursions.

### *By Horse and Cart on the Portland Road*

Before we had a car, we used to travel in a horse drawn cart. Going to Portland in cold weather was a trial. You'd be sitting up on the seat on the cart, exposed to the rain and snow and wind. It was very cold. You'd put your feet in a corn bag and try to keep them a bit warm. We always had buggy lights, but a lot of the old hands would not use them. The lights were only one candle power, but on a cold night they showed the steam rising off the horse and it made you envy the horse as it was the only thing that was warm. The road was steep and rough and the horse would only travel at a walk up the hills, while the occupants of the cart would be shivering with cold.

### *Tom Fitz*

There was a chap here, Tom Fitz, he was a hell of a hard case and a real good chap, but he was great on borrowing. I think it was part of his policy to borrow and he got a lot of fun out of it. He did not always pay back what he borrowed, but he would also lend you anything if he had it and he did not worry if you did not pay him back.

They used to use twelve gauge guns for rabbit shooting and Fitzie never seemed to take enough cartridges, so he used to borrow from his mates. He used to say, "Give us a cartridge, Staity", or "Give us a cartridge, Pas". Some of them got a bit fed up of this so they reckoned that they would load a cartridge specially for him. They nearly filled the shell with powder and then

rammed a number of wads down tight to give it a recoil. When Fitzie asked them for a cartridge, they gave him this one. Fitzie loaded it into his gun and then some of them started to get a bit worried. They thought that they may have overdone the loading. They had never put so much powder in a cartridge before. But they did not tell him. Every time Fitzie looked as if he was going to fire at something, they lost no time in getting well away from him in case the gun blew up. Sometime later Fitzie was standing on a log over a steep little gully, when a rabbit started up. As Fitzie raised his gun and fired, there was a tremendous explosion and a great sheet of flame belched out of the gun for about six feet, and made a cloud of smoke that you could not see through. The recoil knocked Fitzie off the log, but his gun had not blown up. He got up and said "Did I get him? Did I get him?" No one was game to tell him that there was no shot in the cartridge, as he was a lot bigger than the other chaps and could fight like hell. But I doubt that he would have minded very much as he had a great sense of humour, and he probably would have thought that it was not a bad joke.

### *Poverty*

There was a good bit of poverty and hardship in many families at Sunny Corner. As a matter of fact, no one seemed to be well off financially, as it was by no means an affluent place. The ones that suffered most were the young families where one of the parents had died. There seemed to be very little assistance available from any government source, mostly it was other relatives who helped, and usually they were poor themselves.

There was a fairly large family of Stricklands. The mother had died and the father began to drink heavily. There was little margin in wages in those days for anything other than food. George Strickland worked at Portland and stayed down there during the week, and the elder daughters used to look after the younger children. George Strickland was in debt at Bulkeley's Store, and he owed Mr. Fraser, the storekeeper, a lot of money. Fraser's business was by no means prosperous and he had to stop Strickland's credit. The Strickland children nearly starved. I don't know how they did live. They could buy bread, but had nothing to put on it. So they used to go out in the bush and fell a wild bees' nest and they'd come to school with honey sandwiches. They had honey sandwiches all the time until the honey cut out. If you were eating an apple they would rush up and say, "Give us the core". If they had an apple it never had any core to discard. They would sneak into orchards when the fruit was ripe and steal some apples and pears. No one bothered them much for doing this. We told my mother about them and she often put a few extra sandwiches in our lunch for them. George Strickland was killed later in an accident in a kiln at the Portland works, and the family drifted away.

### *Tragedy*

One of George Strickland's sons, also named George, was only twelve when his father died. He could have been a top musician as he had a natural gift for music and could play any musical instrument that he could get his hands on in only a few minutes. Of course as the family had no money, he never had any training. George went to Sydney later, and got into a bit of trouble with the police. He and another chap used to steal the billiard balls from the billiard

saloons in Sydney, and then sell them again. One night they had been drinking a bit, and then they got word that the police were onto them. They decided to flee from Sydney, and they climbed onto the roof of a passenger train at Central Station. They were lying flat on the roof, but as the train sped into the night, George lifted his head to see where they were going, just as the train went under a low bridge. George was killed instantly. He was only twenty years old at the time.

### *Mrs. Passeri and the Yah-hoos*

The Passeris lived down near the racecourse at Sunny Corner. There was old Mrs. Passeri and her two sons, Jack and Bob. They had a couple of acres of ground with their house on it. I don't know just what you would say the house was built of, but it seemed to be built mostly of wattle and daub with various additions of slabs and corrugated iron. It was built almost directly on the ground. The house was very snug and warm. Jack and Bob used to dig potatoes for Alec McDonald during the winter months. One year they were digging at Dogtrap, one of Alec's properties which was five miles away, down towards Portland. The Passeris used to walk to work, and then dig spuds all day with a hand fork. It was really hard work and sometimes they used to camp down there rather than walk all the way home again. They didn't like to leave their mother alone at night, so they asked me and my brother Lance if we would stay with her at night. I was about twelve at that time and Lance was about fourteen. So we used to go down about dark each night, and sleep the night there. They had a big open fire and we would sit in front of the fire on the wild winter nights and Mrs. Passeri would tell us tales of the old days at Sunny Corner.

She was a big, strong, gaunt woman, and she always wore a long black dress which was down to her ankles. She was rather superstitious and some of her tales were really hair-raising, even when the two of us were there. One night Lance could not come down to Mrs. Passeri's, so I was there by myself, and the old lady got to telling me about the wild Hairy Men, or Yah-hoos as she called them. She said that there used to be a lot of them about once and you could hear them at night in the big blackbutt scrubs, singing out "Yah-hoooo! Yah-hoooo!" She said that some of the men used to go out with guns to try to shoot the Yah-hoos, but they never got any. She said you don't hear them now, so they must have died out. She seemed to have a fairly good description of them. They were big, hairy man-like creatures and you'd find where they had turned over logs to get grubs to eat. From the size of the logs they shifted, they must have been very strong.

I was sleeping in a room with the window facing towards the blackbutt scrub, and over this small window, the Passeris had fitted bars into the walls over the window space. These bars were about three quarters of an inch thick and were made of iron. I had often wondered why they had the bars there, and as I lay in bed feeling scared stiff, I hoped that these bars would withstand an attack from the Yah-hoos.

This was in the late 1920s, and I realise now that these Yah-hoos were more than likely curlews. These birds have a most mournful "cur-loooo" cry, and they had been all around Sunny Corner and Dark Corner at the turn of the century, although there were none left in my childhood as the foxes had got them all.



### *Cow-dung Fights*

When I went to school, stone throwing was a most popular sport. Nearly all the kids could throw well, including the girls. We all used to practise as we walked to school, aiming at rabbits, cows and horses if they got within range. Sometimes we would have stone fights, but these were always conducted at fairly long range. No-one was ever seriously hurt, but there were a few near misses. But snowball fights in winter was what we really enjoyed. We used to have tremendous battles. Fights started in an impromptu fashion, but we always had rules and you were not allowed to aim at your opponent's face from close quarters.

In the summer we used to have cow-dung fights. There were a lot of cattle running on the common in those days, so cow-dung was plentiful. Horse-dung was no good as it disintegrated too easily and if you were throwing into the wind it all blew back in your face. But dry cow dung was good stuff to throw. The object was to get your opponent stranded on barren ground where there was no dung, and then pelt him furiously with your own supply. Calf dung could not be used as it was a lot harder than cow dung, and our rules were always fair.

### *The Possum Trapper*

Another interesting character from this area was Curly Simonds. Curly was a small man and in his younger days he had been quite a dandy. Some old photographs that I saw of Curly showed him to be dressed in the height of fashion of the time, and wearing a bowler hat balanced on his mass of dark curly hair. When I knew him he was much older and most of the flashiness had gone out of him. Curly was not over fond of hard work and he was always figuring out ways to make an easy living.

When possums became protected animals this caused the price of skins to rise, and they were quite valuable. If a man was caught with possum skins he was fined heavily, so there was quite a risk in trapping possums. It was well known that Curly was a possum trapper and at times the police went to a lot of trouble to catch him, but Curly seemed to develop a sixth sense for danger and he was never caught. In later years, when he had given away possum trapping, mainly because there were not enough possums left to trap, he told me of some of his experiences.

He had been trapping out behind Dark Corner for some time, and had three bags of skins that he wanted to get to market. He knew that Sheridan, the policeman at Sunny Corner, had an idea that Curly had possum skins and was waiting to catch him when he took them through Sunny Corner to the railway at Piper's Flat. Curly finally hit on an idea. There had been an old cyanide plant at Dark Corner and there were a lot of old zinc shavings lying around. The zinc shavings had been used to precipitate the gold in the cyanide process.

Curly put his possum skins in good bags and then put these bags into old chaff bags. He then packed zinc shavings into the chaff bags all around the possum skin bags. The old chaff bags were full of holes and Curly made sure that the zinc shavings showed prominently through these holes.

He loaded up his sulky and took off. When he got to Sunny Corner, sure enough Sheridan was waiting for him. So as not to appear in a hurry and thus arouse suspicion, Curly stopped at the water trough at the Royal Hotel and

gave his horse a drink. Sheridan walked over to him and said, "What have you got in those bags?" Curly knew that if he had replied that he had zinc shavings, Sheridan would probably make him tip out the bags. So he said boldly, "Possum skins. What do you think of them?" Sheridan could see the zinc shavings through the holes in the bags and said, "Been gathering a few shavings eh, think there is any gold in them?" Curly said that he hoped so. Sheridan was pulling out some of the shavings and Curly was in a hell of a fright, thinking that at any moment one of the inner bags would show. So he said, "Well I'd better get on so that I don't miss the train", and he drove off. He had managed to appear quite calm throughout this ordeal, so that Sheridan never suspected his trick.

### *Rabbit Duffing*

You may have heard of cattle duffing. Well there used to be rabbit duffing too. Curly Simonds told me another story about this. A lot of people trapped rabbits for a living once. There were so many people rabbiting that you often could not get permission to enter private property. This led to a number of unauthorised trappers entering other people's property and this was called duffing. Duffing was a bit risky as you could be fined for illegal trespass or have your traps confiscated by the property owner. Traps cost a good deal, and you could not afford to lose them.

Curly was duffing a paddock somewhere in the Palmer's Oakey area when he came across a line of traps set by someone else. He guessed that these had been set by some other trespasser like himself, as the property owner would not let trappers onto his place. Curly set his own line of traps in a different part of the property late that night, and returned just on daylight to collect the rabbits. But all his traps had been pulled up and taken. At the place where the last one had been pulled up there was a note left by the property owner. It said, "Come up to the homestead for your traps". Curly did not fancy an encounter with the property owner who was known to be a big, aggressive man who had no great liking for Curly Simonds.

But Curly hit on another idea. He went back to the other line of traps that he had seen earlier, and he took exactly the same number of traps that had been taken from his own line. He then left the property owner's note at the last trap and quickly left the scene and shifted his camp. Curly reckoned that he had gained on the deal, as his newly acquired traps were a better brand than his old ones. He had been using the wire-sprung Lane rabbit traps which were lightweight but not very durable. The replacement traps were of the Bunyip brand, and were a much more expensive trap to buy.

Many years later, Curly heard the outcome of this episode. The other trapper had come and found that his line of thirty traps was missing, and there was the note from the property owner where the traps had been. He was a lot gamier than Curly and had gone up to the homestead. He received an awful tongue-lashing before the property owner told him to take his traps and get out. The trapper saw the traps and said, "These are not mine. My traps were Bunyips and these are Lanes". But the property owner was in a rage and in no mood to argue. "I gathered up thirty traps, and you lost thirty traps. These are the traps that I found, and if you tell any more lies you won't get your traps back!"

The poor trapper was mystified, but he took the traps and went. He was talking some time later to Tom Scott about this mystery. He just couldn't understand it. He had lost thirty traps and found the note left by the property owner. But his traps had been Bunyips and yet the property owner had gathered up thirty Lane traps. Curly had told Tom what had happened, but Tom never let on to the other trapper that he knew anything about it. To the best of my knowledge the trapper never did work it out.

### *Horse Racing*

I remember one race meeting at the Sunny Corner Racecourse when I was about seven years old. This was in about 1922. The racecourse consisted of a hundred acres and horse races had been run regularly for years. The course fell into disuse for a while, but then Ryan the schoolteacher conceived the idea of reopening the race club. Ryan was always one who liked to use his wits to outsmart others. He somehow acquired a racehorse by the name of Gold Collar. This was a big chestnut gelding that had done a lot of racing when it was young, and could still gallop pretty well. Ryan and Sheridan (the policeman) somehow always managed to have their money on the winning horse, whether it was Gold Collar or some other horse.

So on this particular occasion, there was a huge crowd at the racecourse. Most of the crowd had their money on Gold Collar, but Ryan and Sheridan did not, and neither did Gold Collar's jockey, Billy Ryman. Of course Gold Collar was not in on this intrigue, and he got so far out in front that there did not seem to be any way that the other horses could catch him. The crowd were all yelling, "Come on Gold Collar, come on Gold Collar!" Billy Ryman glanced back and realized how far ahead he was. There was only one thing he could do to stop Gold Collar from winning, and he did it. He suddenly sat back on the reins so hard that Gold Collar's mouth flew open and he nearly stopped. The other horses flew past him, and the horse that Ryan and Sheridan had backed came in first. Well, then there was a hell of a hullabulloo amongst the crowd. There were chaps yelling and trying to get at Billy Ryman. Sheridan kept shouting, "Keep back! Keep back! Or I'll run you all in!" The stewards had an enquiry and Ryman said he had pulled the horse up because Gold Collar had a shoulder defect, and he had felt it give way. The stewards accepted this but the crowd did not. There were still more races to be run, and many of the men were out to get Ryman.

Lance and I had wandered down to where the saddle horses were tied up, a bit out of sight of the main crowd. When the next race started and the crowd were occupied, Ryman came running down through the bush and saddled up a horse. We asked him if he was going to ride in another race. "Yes", he said, "A race that is very important for me to win". Ryman sprang onto his horse and galloped like mad out through the racecourse gates and over the hill towards Portland. I think we were the only ones that saw him go. He never came back to Sunny Corner.

At later race meetings the Western Districts Racing Association supervised the proceedings so everything was done fair and above suspicion and there were none of the spectacular and exciting incidents like we used to have when Ryan and his gang were running the races. The racecourse is gone altogether now. There used to be giant eucalypts there, standing over a hundred feet high

and some with a girth of twenty feet. But the whole area was bulldozed and is now a pine plantation.

### *Giant Tarantulas*

I used to get involved in quite a few pranks in my time, I suppose you would call it larrikinism. But the generation before me were no different. Oscar Stait belonged to that generation and was always mixed up in the pranks of his day. He told me of one such prank.

In those days you could buy big imitation spiders made of baked clay. Today they are made out of plastic, but there wasn't any plastic then. Oscar Stait and Bob Passeri bought one of these clay spiders. It was huge and painted with red and purple stripes and blue spots. The legs were made with brass springs and the spider wobbled about like a live thing. Old Tom Berry was digging for gold down near Bob's Creek. He was working about ten feet down a shaft. Oscar and Bob tied their spider to a string on a stick and they lowered it down the shaft to where Tom Berry was working, and then lay waiting in the long grass above for the desired effect. It was a while before Tom saw the spider, but when he straightened up it was dangling just in front of his face. He let out an awful yell and swung his shovel at it so hard that he broke the shovel handle. Oscar and Bob pulled the spider up quickly and ran off as Tom started up his ladder. They knew they would get a real belting from old Tom if he caught them.

Tom did not dig there much after that. Someone asked him what the gold was like there. Tom said, "It wasn't bad, in fact better than where I am digging now, but there were great trantlers there. They were the worst trantlers I have ever seen. If one bit you I don't think you would ever get out of the hole and it's just not worth the risk to dig there".

### *Lavatories on Their Sides*

Another prank that Oscar Stait was involved in occurred on New Year's Eve many years back. All of the houses in the town had outdoor lavatories, built of weatherboard and some distance from the houses. One New Year's Day, Lance and I had walked to the town and noticed that all the lavatories were on their sides. This puzzled us greatly, but many years later Oscar told me what had happened. He was one of group who were celebrating New Year's Eve in the town. They thought it would be a great joke to push over all the town's lavatories. The most difficult, said Oscar, was the one at Bulkeley's Store, which was a two-seater. It took fifteen men to do it, but push it over they did. The hotel used to have a five-seater, and quite some distance from the hotel too. It must have been difficult for the guests at night and particularly in snowy weather. There were never any outdoor lights, and the guests had to carry lanterns.

### *Charleston and Gardner*

The Sunny Corner mine was worked by Charleston and Gardner for a time, and it is worth recording what I have heard about these two men.

John Kemp Charleston came from Cornwell as a young man. The Cornishmen were called Cousin Jacks. Cornwell was an impoverished place and a lot of tin

mining went on there. Children of even six years of age used to turn the drills for their fathers in the Cornish mines. The better miners became “captains” or “cap-ons” as they were referred to. The managers would be known as “The Bass” meaning the boss.

Charleston knew a bit about mining and he’d also had some training as a ship’s wright during his early life. This was on the old sailing ships, and a good deal of the work involved replacing wooden planks which required precision adze work. Charleston was an expert with an adze. He could finish off a twenty foot plank so that it appeared as if it had been planed. Somewhere during his career he had also acquired a lot of engineering skill and knowledge.

But despite all this practical knowledge, Charleston was not a good judge of a mine from a financial point of view, and many of his mining ventures failed because of this.

When Charleston was very old and living in an old-people’s home in Sydney, he wrote to my father to ask if he would sort through all the papers that were left in his office at the Sunny Corner mine. I assisted in going through these papers. Charleston had made copies of all his correspondence from the time when he was first at the mine. This was done by writing over a gelatine pad. The pad was then inked and placed with another sheet of paper into a letter press which was then squeezed down to make the copy. All these copies showed an evolution in Charleston’s handwriting, from a cramped and childish style to the flowing copperplate style of his later years. There were copies too, of the letters that he had written home to his parents in Cornwall, and also his mother’s replies. Charleston married quite late in life. His wife was a French woman, and the couple did not have any children.

Charleston’s correspondence showed that he was a real optimist – each mine that he became involved with was going to be the best. After some initial success the tide seemed to turn and he was faced with failure after failure. He had hoped to return home to see his parents, but was never able to. At one time he had ordered two cane chairs to be delivered to his parents in Cornwall. His mother wrote and thanked him for the chairs and said how nice they were. His father was old and very poorly and used to sit in his cane chair and cry a lot as he longed to see his boys, so wrote his mother in an uncertain, laborious hand.

I only remember seeing Charleston once. I must have only been about five years old at the time. I remember that he had a black beard, wore a black Homberg hat and was well dressed in the fashion of the time for a gentleman. He had a gold watch chain draped across his vest. He was a stockily built man and had a stylish sulky with a shiny black pony.

Charleston loved to talk about his ideas, about the machinery that he had installed and how it operated, and what he was going to do with the mine, and why. With all this technical talk he was hard pressed to get someone to listen to him. What was of intense interest to Charleston was not always so for his listeners, who would tend to wander off half way through his discourse. So he developed the habit of holding on to the coat button of his victim. Having secured his audience, Charleston would hold on tenaciously. The victim might look bored and squirm and shuffle his feet but this had no effect on Charleston, who would only release his hold on the button when he had exhausted his subject matter.

Frank Lacroix Gardner was an American with French blood in him. I know

less about him than I know about Charleston. Gardner was at one time Charleston’s financial backer. Gardner was a millionaire and had made his money from an association with Zeb Lane in Western Australia, on the gold fields there. He was a big, dark handsome man with a most courteous manner. In addition to his Australian mining interests he had a big office apartment in London and was involved with the London Stock Exchange. I do not know exactly when he became associated with Charleston, but he was financially involved with mining at Sunny Corner, with the Sunny Corner mine itself, with the Nevada mine and with the Lagoon Creek Gold Mine. All of these ventures failed. I saw a letter from Gardner to Charleston, saying that he had poured an immense amount of money into Charleston’s mines and it was almost unbelievable that none of these mines had returned any of his money.

Some time later Gardner was travelling by ship and had taken his daughter with him for the voyage. On board ship his daughter fell down a stairway and was killed. His daughter’s tragic death affected Gardner deeply. In addition to this his financial affairs had slipped. It seems that not only had he lost a lot of money with Charleston, but also a lot of his other investments had gone bad. He disappeared from the business world, and later it was heard that he had suicided.

### *The Dances*

Dancing was always a popular pastime at Sunny Corner, and there were dances here from as far back as I can remember. The hall has been rebuilt now, but it used to be a big galvanized iron building standing on level ground. Being at ground level was an advantage in some ways, but a disadvantage in others. When it rained heavily the water raced down off the higher ground, bringing a lot of red mud with it, which would stop short just outside the hall. When there was a dance on wet nights, the locals knew the places where they could cross the muddy ground by stepping on tussocks, even in the dark. But the visitors from other towns such as Portland and Cullen often used to get mud up to their ankles as they entered the hall.

As kids we always used to go up to the dances. Not that we danced, but it was somewhere to go. Jack and Bob Passeri would play the accordion. They played by ear, but they were really good and they used to play for all the dances.

Sometimes things were a bit dull, but occasionally there would be a fight and this brightened up the evening for us boys. Most of the fights would be between two drunks who had suffered from some imaginary insult. They would go out on the grass and thrash it out for a while, mostly doing little harm to each other. Then some chap would step in between them to restore order. They would shake hands and have another drink and go back in for a dance. But by this time they would be in such a dishevelled state that no women would dance with them. After a round of refusals from the womenfolk, the two men would often end up dancing together. It was amusing to see the two gladiators, who just a short time ago were trying to knock the daylight out of each other, dancing away together in perfect peace.



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## INDEX

### A

Abbott, Mrs. Maisie, 189  
 Aborigines, 180-3  
 Accident to miner, 109  
 Adelaide, S.A., smelter site, 16  
 Airlie House, 175  
 Aitcheson, William, 173  
 Amalgamation process, 3, 22  
 American silver mines, 16  
 Americans at Sunny Corner, 4, 8-9, 16-18, 21, 94-5  
   names listed, 17  
 Anderson (gold miner), 66  
 Anderson, Mr. (American), 17, 51  
 Anglican Church, Sunny Corner, 126  
   Cullen Bullen, 128  
   Meadow Flat, 126  
 Animals, native, 186  
   feral, 186-7, 189  
   see also Fauna, and Birds  
 Antwerp, Belgium, trial shipment of ore to, 34  
 Arizona, U.S.A., 16  
 Arsenic poisoning, 71-7  
 Ashby, 71  
 Asher, Dr. (Lithgow), 175  
 Ashton Gold Mining Co., 70  
 Assay Office, 8-9, 46  
 Atkinson, Sergeant (Lithgow), 175  
 Attuell (gold miner), 66  
 Attuell, Arthur J., 135  
 Attuell, Elsie, 136, 137  
 Attuell, Gerald, 150  
 Attuell, Rita, 136, 138  
 Auctioneers, listed, 155  
 Australian Exploration Co., 70  
 Australian Joint Stock Bank (A.J.S.), 106-7, 157  
 Aylin, Charles, 137

### B

B.H.P., 17-20  
   directors visit Sunny Corner, 1885, 15  
   first smelters for, 15, 17  
   formation of, 15  
   recent exploration of Sunny Corner area by, 39  
   solution of sulphide problem by, 34  
 Badden, 71  
 Bakers, listed, 155-6  
 Band, town, 104  
 Bank robbery 106-7

Banks, listed, 156  
 Barnett, Rev. George H., 125  
 Barrier Ranges Silver Mining Company, visit to Sunny Corner in 1884, 15  
 Barrier Ranges, 15, 17  
 Bartle, Mrs., 159  
 Bartlett, Rev., 126  
 Bathurst, journey from Sunny Corner to, (1891), 109-10  
 Baucher, 70  
 Beattie, 67  
 Bedford, Alice, 124  
 Beehive Stores, 104, 124, 161  
 Belgium, trial shipment of ore to, 34, bricks from, 62  
 Bell, Hector, 155  
 Benson, Brian, 150  
 Bensusan and Co., 3  
 Bensusan, S.L., 5  
 Berlin (Germany), planned shipment of ore to, 35  
 Berry, Tom, 207  
 Beta photographer, 163  
 Big Hill, gold mines at, 65-6  
   amount of gold taken from, 66  
 Billiard saloons, 123  
   listed, 156  
 Birds, current list, 187-8  
   historical list, 188-9  
   parrot pies, 167  
 Black mineral, at Sunny Corner mine, 21, 26  
   at Silver King mine, 52, 53  
 Black Springs, 48, 49  
 Blackberries, 167-8  
   history of, 191  
 Blackfellows Hands, 180  
 Blacksmiths, listed, 156  
 Bland (Yetholme), gold mining, 66, 70  
 Bland, John  
   re Kirkconnell hotel, 112  
   historical bird list by, 188-9  
 Boarding houses, listed, 156  
 Bob's Creek, gold mines at, 67  
 Boiler house, 45  
 Bond, 66, 71  
 Bond, Constable (Sofala), 173  
 Boon, Constable, 133  
 Bootmakers, listed, 156  
 Bora rings, 180  
 Bourke, 67  
 Bowtell, B., 157

Boxing and wrestling, 115  
 Brault, F., 157  
 Brennan, R., 119  
 Bright, John  
   reef, 67  
 Brisbane, Governor, 182  
 British Lion mine, 63  
 Brognorcolley, Francis, 120  
 Broken Hill, 14-15  
   first silver finds at, 15  
   first silver smelters in district of, 15  
   link with Sunny Corner, 15  
   pollution at, 74-6  
   timber used underground at, 38  
 Brown, H.Y.L., 3  
 Brown, Henry Giles, 65  
 Brown, Rev. J.W., 125  
 Browne, 66  
 Brownlow's Fruit Mart, 159  
 Brownlow, A., 161  
 Bryant, Albert, 155  
 Bryant, G.H. & Sons, 155  
 Bryant, Walter, 155  
 Buckfield, W., 137  
 Builders, listed, 156  
 Bulkeley's store, 165, 202  
   listed, 161  
 Bulkeley, gold miner, 67  
 Bulkeley, Mrs. (Cullen Bullen), 128  
 Bulkeley, Richard H., 136  
 Bulldog mine, 63, 64, 65  
 Bullecourt Mining Syndicate, 67  
 Bullion, silver, first bars of, 11-13  
 Bullock teams, 121, 184  
   in 1920s, 197-8  
 Bunker, Arthur, 155  
 Bushranger, "Slippery Jack", 172-7  
 Bushrangers Hill/Mountain, gold mine, 67  
 Businesses, listed, 155-63  
 Butchers, listed 155

C

Calcining, 22  
 Calderbank, Albert, 149, 200-1  
 California, U.S.A., 16, 17  
 Cameron, Daniel, 138  
 Campbell, Daniel, 139  
 Campbell, Donald, 65, 69, 127  
 Capertee  
   hotel brought to Sunny Corner from,  
   114  
   Weinert's Bakery at, 118  
   bushranger at, 174-5  
 Carr, 66, 71

Carr, Edward V., 115, 123  
 Carriers, listed, 159  
 Carr's Billiard Saloon, 115, 123  
 Carr's Jeweller, 161  
 Case, Ian, 150  
 Casey, Father Patrick, 129  
 Catholic church  
   Cullen Bullen, 128, 129, 130  
   Kirkconnell, 131-2  
   Sunny Corner, 129  
 Catholic Convent and School, 130  
   Sisters of, 130  
 Central mine, 63  
 Chadwick, Alf, 157  
 Chapman, J.T., 67  
 Charleston, John Kemp, 30-6, 44, 67-8,  
   207-9  
 Chellew, Miss Mary, 147  
 Chemists and herbalists  
   listed, 157  
 Cherry, James, 157  
 Chimney (still standing at Sunny Corner  
   mine), 26-30, 46  
 Chiplin, C.W., 36, 44, 147-8  
 Churches, 123-32  
   Catholic church and convent,  
     Sunny Corner, 120-30  
   Catholic church  
     Cullen Bullen, 129-30  
     Kirkconnell, 131-2  
   Church of England,  
     Cullen Bullen, 128  
     Meadow Flat, 126  
     Sunny Corner, 126  
   Methodist church,  
     Cullen Bullen, 128-9  
   Presbyterian church, Portland, 127  
   Presbyterian church, Sunny Corner,  
     126-7  
   Salvation Army, 127  
   Union church, West Mitchell, 127  
   Wesleyan church (Methodist),  
     Meadow Flat, 125  
     Sunny Corner, 124-6  
 Churches vs hotels, 103, 124  
 Circuses  
   travelling, 104  
 Clark, R., (undertaker), 163  
 Clark, W., 49  
 Clarke, R., 124, 157  
 Clarke, T.D., 157  
 Clear Creek, 173, 183  
 Clifton, Charles, 161  
 Club House Hotel

Bathurst, 120  
 Lewis Ponds, 112  
 Sunny Corner, 121-2  
 Coaches, listed, 159  
 Cobb and Co., 100, 159  
 Cobb, Mr., 150  
 Cockle Creek Smelting Company, 35, 37  
 Cohen, Ben, 161  
 Cohen (tailor), 163  
 Coleman, Bill, 47  
 Colorado, U.S.A., 16, 17  
 Commercial Bank, 88, 157  
 Commercial Hotel, Lewis Ponds, 120  
 Common, town, 185-6, 194, 200  
 Comstock silver mine, U.S.A., 16  
 Concentrating process, 22  
 Considine, 66  
 Convent at Sunny Corner, 129-30  
 Cook (builder), 152  
 Cook (gold miner), 66  
 Cook, Charlie, 69  
 Cook, Frank, 125  
 Cook, Jack, 69  
 Cook, John, 69  
 Cook, Selina, 151  
 Cooke, Mr. (teacher), 142  
 Cooking, 1920s-50s, 167  
 Copeland, Mr., M.P., 62, 64  
 Copper  
   production figures for Sunny Corner  
   mine, 40-1  
 Copper matte, at Nevada mine, 58  
 Cordial makers, listed, 159  
 Cornstalk silver mine  
   Sunny Corner, 16, 63, 64  
 Coronation syndicate, 66  
 Court House, 132, 133  
 Court House Hotel  
   Sunny Corner, 120-1  
 Cox, William, 182  
 Creasy's Line of Coaches, 159  
 Cresswell, William, 149  
 Cricket, 104-5  
 Criterion Hotel  
   Sunny Corner, 119  
 Cromelin, Constable, 133  
 Cromelin, Sergeant, 173  
 Crystal Theatre  
   Portland, 170  
 Cullen Bullen  
   Catholic church, 128, 129, 130  
   Church of England, 128  
   Methodist church, 128-9  
 Cullen, C.F., 117

Curnow, 70, 71  
 Cyanide poisoning, 77-8  
 Cyanide treatment of gold, 70, 77-8  
 Cycling, 105

## D

Dances, 119, 209  
 Dark Corner  
   gold mines, 68-71  
   naming of, 107  
   post office, 134, 138-9  
   school, 150-5  
   1880s church service at, 129  
 Darwin, Charles (visits Bathurst), 183  
 Davoren, Father P.R., 129  
 Dawson, George, 139  
 Dawson, Steve, 115, 159  
 Daylight Creek  
   1886 description of, 58-9  
 Depression years, 171  
 Dickens, 71  
 Dobbie, John, 127  
 Doble, Billy, 159  
 Doctors, list of, 110, 159  
 Dog Trap Creek mine, 63, 64  
 Dolan, Miss Mary, 152-4  
 Dolman, Sergeant, 133  
 Donald, James, 143, 144  
 Donnelly's Line of Coaches, 101, 159  
 Doran, Father Thomas, 129  
 Dowling, George, 157  
 Doyle, 66  
 Draper, Alfred, 122  
 Draper, Sophia, 122  
 Drapers' shops, list of, 159  
 Drew, John, 157  
 Duggan, 66  
 Duke, J., 157  
 Dunleavy, Stephen, 71  
 Dunn, George, 71  
 Dunn, Martin, 71  
 Dunn's Reef gold mine, 71  
 Dwyer, Charles (Lewis Ponds), 113

## E

Eather, Thomas J., 159  
 Eclipse Photographic Company, 163  
 Edison phonograph, 105-6, 121  
 Edwards, Mr., 57  
 Edwards, W., 161  
 Egan, Michael F., 122  
 Electricity, 150, 166, 171-2  
 Elms, Mrs. Marie, 138  
 Ensor, Rev. Ernest, 125

Entertainment  
 1880s and 1890s, 102-6  
 1920s to 1950s, 166, 170-1  
 dances, 119, 209  
 Environment  
   historical summary, 184-5  
   see also, Flora, Fauna, Trees, Fumes,  
     Health and Pollution  
 Eskbank iron smelting works, Lithgow,  
 47, 57  
 Eucalyptus oil distilleries, 171, 184-5  
 European occupation of Bathurst district,  
 181-3  
 Evans, Assistant Surveyor, 181  
 Evening school, 127, 146  
 Everingham, Rev. W., 126  
 Exploration for minerals  
   recent, 39, 66, 70  
 Eyres, Thomas, 20, 44  
 Eyton Brothers smelting works, Wales, 57

## F

Fabricius, Oscar, 56, 57  
 Farnsworths mine, 63  
 Farrelly, James, 149, 200  
 Fauna, 186-9  
   birds, 187-9  
   feral animals, 186-7  
   possum trapping, 204-5  
   rabbits, 167, 186, 205  
 Federal mine, 67, 71  
 Fenton, bricklayer, 157  
 Ferguson, Colin, 126  
 Ferguson, Tom, 198  
 Firewood cutting 1920s to 1950s, 167  
 Fish shop, 102, 159  
 "Fitz", Tom, 201-2  
 Fitzgerald, Jack, 155  
 Fitzgerald, Millie and Tom, 145  
 Flagstaff Hill, 92  
 Flanagan, Rev. E.J., 129  
 Fletcher, A.W., 137  
 Flora and fauna reserves, 186, 192,  
   map 193  
 Flora, list of species, 189-91  
   see also Trees  
 Flotation process, 22  
 Flue dust  
   collection of, 1880s, 23, 45, 73; 1917-  
   22, 38  
 Fluxes used in smelting, 11-13, 37-8, 47  
 Flynn, John (Jack), 155  
 Food, 1920s to 1950s, 167  
 Football ground, 119

Forestry Commission, 191-2  
 Frances, 71  
 Francis, George (plumber), 146  
 Francis, George (publican), 115  
 Francis, William G.S., 115  
 Frank, C.F. (Palmer's Oakey store), 173  
 Frappell, A., 157  
 Fraser, Charles, 163  
 Fraser, George, 163, 202  
 Frenchmans Reef, 66  
 Frew, R., 67  
 Frieberg (Germany), 58  
 Frieberg Tunnel, 63, 64  
 Fruit shops, listed, 159  
 Fumes from silver smelters  
   at Broken Hill, 74-5  
   at public smelter, 73  
   at Silver King mine, 51  
   causing sickness, 71-7  
   description of, 89  
   effect on drinking water, 75  
     at school, 146  
   effect on town roofs, 75  
   killing vegetation, 72, 73, 184  
   "preventing epidemics", 72

## G

Gafford and Hogue patent smelter, 17, 50,  
 53  
 Gafford, J.B., 11, 17, 50  
   visit to Broken Hill, 17  
 Gallagher, Mr., (Airly), 175  
 Gannon, Mrs., 163  
 Gant, 66  
 Gardner (Gardiner), Andy, 157  
 Gardner, Frank Lacroix, 32-5, 67, 208-9  
 Garland, 63  
 Garlands lease, 63, 64  
 General Gordon mine, 63, 64  
 General Resources, 39  
 General stores, listed, 161  
 Gold  
   at Sunny Corner mine prior to 1884,  
   1-2  
   amount found after 1884, 40-1  
   first rush at Mitchell's Creek, 64-5, 79  
   fossicking in Depression years, 171  
   price of, 2, 40, 41, 65  
   recent exploration for, 39, 64, 66, 70  
 Gold mines  
   at Sunny Corner and Dark Corner, 64-  
   71  
   Big Hill, 65-6  
   Bob's Creek, 67

Bushrangers Hill (Mountain), 67  
 Dunn's Reef, 71  
 Federal, 67, 71  
 Frenchmans Reef, 66  
 Hidden Treasure, 65-6  
 Homeward Bound, 70-1  
 Lady Mary Reef, 71  
 Lagoon Creek, 67-8  
 Little Hill, 66  
 Mitchell's Creek, 64-5  
 Monte Christo, 67  
 Moonlight Claim, 67  
 N.S.W. Band and Albion, 65-6  
 Paddy Lackey, 68-70  
 St. George, 70-1  
 Sunny Corner, 1-2  
 Sure Gift, 71  
 The Great Victoria, 71  
 Turpins Gully, 67  
 Gordon, Don, 150  
 Gossan  
   description of, 21  
 Gower, Miss Ida, 143, 150  
 Grabham, Abraham, 139  
 Grabham, Bob, 155  
 Grabham, Jack, 69  
 Grabham, Mary Lydia, 130  
 Grabham, Wed, 69  
 Grabham's butchers shop, 166  
 Grady, Dr. J.F., 106, 110  
 Graham, E., 157  
 Gramophone, 166  
 Grant, 71  
 Graves, 63  
 Great Britain mine, 63, 64  
 Great Mitchell Extended Silver Mining  
   Co., 62, 63  
 Great Victoria gold mine, 71  
 Great Western mine, 16, 60  
 Greenwell, C.T., 137  
 Grenfell, Dave, 115  
 Grey, 71  
 Griffin, J., 157  
 Gustavson, 123

## H

Hairdressers, listed, 161  
 Hall, community (Victoria Hall), 118,  
 119, 152, 209  
 Hall, Edgar, 44  
 Halliday, H., 157  
 Hambly, John, 157  
 Hampton or Hampden, 70  
 Hampton, Henry, 44

Hart's Drapery Store, 159  
 Havenhand, Francis (Frank), 120-1  
 Hay (or Hoy), blacksmith, 157  
 Health, 71-8  
   see also Fumes  
 Heath, Father Michael, 129  
 Hemsworth brothers, 54  
 Hemsworth family, 93  
 Hemsworth, George, 123  
 Hemsworth, J., 58  
 Henry, Dr., 110  
 Hidden Treasure gold mine, 65  
 Historic Site  
   Sunny Corner mine, 39, 192  
 Hodgson, George, 135  
 Hogue, A.E., 17, 50  
 Holman (gold miner), 67  
 Holman, Annie, 144  
 Holman, George, 161  
 Holterman and Icke, 62  
 Holy Trinity Church of England, 126  
 Home brewed wine, 170  
 Homes  
   description of, 1920s-1950s, 168  
   Homeward Bound gold mine, 70-1  
   Honest John mine, 63, 64  
   Horse racing, 103, 104, 117, 206  
   see also Racecourse  
 Hoskins, 66  
 Hospital, 108-10  
 Hotels, 110-23  
   in Sunny Corner district  
     Club House, 121-2  
     Court House, 120-1  
     Criterion, 119  
     Kirkconnell, 111-12  
     McLachlan's, 111  
     Miners' Arms, 111  
     Royal, 113-16  
     Royal Exchange, 116-18  
     Silver Street, 120  
     Star, 118-19  
     Star Inn, 111  
     Tattersall's, 122-3  
   elsewhere  
     Club House, Bathurst, 120  
     Club House, Lewis Ponds, 112  
     Commercial, Lewis Ponds, 120  
     Muswellbrook, 122  
     Pilliga, 122  
     Royal, Capertee, 114  
     Royal, Lucknow, 120  
     Royal, Rydal, 100  
   list of, 161



Hotels vs churches, 103, 124  
 Houses  
   description of, 1920s-1950s, 168  
   moved to Portland, 165  
 Hudson Brothers  
   builders, Sunny Corner, 137, 157  
   Granville, 50  
 Hughey (blacktracker), 174  
 Humphries, S.G., 56  
 Hurley (gold miner), 66, 67  
 Hurley, George, 5, 49  
 Hurley, John, 2-4, 5, 49, 62, 155, 163  
 Hurley, William, 2-3, 5, 11, 20, 44, 50, 62  
 Hurst, John, 135  
 Hutchinson, Rev. A., 124  
 Hutchinson, T.A., 67, 71

**I**  
 I.X.L. Stores, 161  
 Inches Bonanza, 63, 64  
 Independent mine, 63, 64  
 Intercolonial Smelting Company, 16, 17  
 Investment in silver, 5, 19, 23, 56  
 Iron foundry, 47

**J**  
 James, John, 149  
 Jamieson, William, (B.H.P.) 15  
 Janitzky, Mr., 44  
 Jeffree, Joe, 157  
 Jeffree, Will, 108, 143  
 Jewellers' shops, listed, 161  
 John Bright reef, 67  
 Johnson (gold miner), 65  
 Johnson, Ambrose, 61-2, 71  
 Johnston, Jane, 144  
 Johnston, M., 60  
 Jollie, David, 149  
 Jones, Miss Agnes, 159, 166  
 Journeys  
   see Roads, Railway, Transport

**K**  
 Kahlo, Charles, 4-5, 14  
 Kearns, Constable (Rylstone), 174  
 Kearns, Mrs. Harriet, 126  
 Keating, W.F., 137  
 Kell, G., 157  
 Kelly, Bowes (B.H.P.), 15  
 Kelly, Rev. J., 129  
 Kennedy, John, 155  
 Kilfoyle, Margaret, 155  
 King, Fred (blacktracker), 174  
 Kirk, Thomas, 150

Kirkconnell  
   church, 131-2  
   hotel, 111-12  
 Kissell, 71  
 Kitch, G.B.D., photographer, 163  
 Kopsch, A., 157

**L**  
 La Monte, John D., 4-5, 11, 14-16, 19, 54-5  
 La Rosa, John, 175, 176  
 Lachlan's (McLachlan's) hotel, 111, 161  
 Lackey (Lahy), Paddy, 68, 195-6  
 Lady Mary Reef, 71  
 Lagoon Creek gold mine, 33, 67-8  
 Lamond, Jimmy, 115  
 Land tenure  
   Forestry Commission, 191-2  
   Miner's Rights and residential leases, 185  
   public reserves, 192,  
     map 193  
   town blocks, 86  
   town common, 185-6, 200

Lane, Abraham, 113, 120  
 Lane, Zeb, 33, 209  
 Laughton & Co., 157  
 Laurie, 66  
 Laury, J.W., 126  
 Lawler, Mrs., 137  
 Lawler, Phil, 157  
 Lawler, Thomas, 138  
 Le Blang store, 161  
 Le Fung, Jean, 175, 176  
 Le Messurier, John, and brothers, 155  
 Lead  
   amount produced from Sunny Corner mine, 41  
 Lead dust  
   retreatment of, 23  
 Lead poisoning, 71-7  
   effects of, 74-6  
   preventatives, 76  
   see also Fumes  
 Lead Poisoning Act 1895, 75  
 Lean, Bert, 128  
 Lean, Richard  
   re Beehive Store, 104, 124  
   re first car in N.S.W., 169  
   re gold mining, 65-6, 69  
   re Mitchell's Creek, 79  
   re naming of Sunny Corner, 107  
   re picture shows, 103-4  
   re Royal Hotel, 114

re Union church, 127-8  
 re Wesleyan church, 124  
 transporting injured miner, 109  
 Lemon, George, 50  
 Lewis Ponds  
   removal of hotels to, 112-13, 120  
 Lifestyle  
   1880s and 1890s, 102-6  
   1920s to 1950s, 165-72  
 Lighting  
   1920s to 1950s, 167  
 Lithgow Munitions Factory, 171  
 Llewellyn, Miss M.N., 137, 163  
 Llewellyn, R., 163  
 Lloyd, Lewis, 58  
 Lonerigan, P., 161  
 Longton, Thomas, 124  
 Longton, W. Joseph, 44  
 Lord, 66  
 Lord, W.H., 67  
 Loth, 66  
 Loth, I.V., 139  
 Louis, W.T., 163  
 Lukin, Gresley, 20, 44

**M**  
 MacCartney, Mrs., 129  
 Mackintosh, Dr., 110  
 Macquarie, Governor, 182  
 Magill (gold miner), 71  
 Magill, Robert Waller, 110, 119  
 Mail order catalogues, 169  
 Main, R., 161  
 Manager's cottage at Sunny Corner mine, 46-7  
 Mann, Doug, 150  
 Mann's store, 161, 165  
 Manson & Co., 161  
 Mara, Susan, 150  
 Mara's Coaches, 159  
 Marshall, 67  
 Marshall, M., 60  
 Martial law 1824, 182  
 Martin family (re church bell), 128  
 Martin, Jack  
   list of animals 1890s, 186  
   re birds, 189  
   re school, 154  
 Martin, Jack and Eric, 157  
 Martin, Mrs. Emmaline, 139  
 Martyn, Kathleen, 152  
 Matte, 24-5  
   at Nevada mine, 58  
   at Silver King mine, 52

Maxey, Mrs., 163  
 McAskew, 71  
 McConvid, Constable, 174  
 McCook, Rev., 127  
 McDonald, Alec (1920s), 166, 203  
 McDonald, Alexander (1865), 1  
 McDonald, John, 155  
 McDoual, 71  
 McEvoy, 173  
 McGee, Fr. Stanislaus, 129  
 McIntosh, 67  
 McKellar, 66  
 McKenzie brothers, 67  
 McKenzie, 66  
 McKenzie, Dr. (1865), 1  
 McLachlan (gold miner), 66  
 McLachlan brothers, 67  
 McLachlan, Colin, 135  
 McLachlan, Daniel, 111  
 McLachlan's Hotel, West Mitchell, 111  
 McManus, Constance, 152  
 McNamara  
   manager of "Warrie", 174  
 McNeil, 67  
 McPhail, Bruce, 143  
 McPhail, Francis, 95, 127, 142-3, 144, 146  
 Meadow Flat  
   Church of England, 123, 126  
   post office store 1881, 65  
   road to Sunny Corner from, 87, 100-1  
   Wesleyan church, 123, 125  
 Medcalf, William, 139, 141-2  
 Melrose Works, San Francisco, 17  
 Mercer, Florence, 151  
 Mercury poisoning, 77  
 Methodist church, 124-6  
 Millen, 67  
 Mine managers at Sunny Corner mine, listed, 44  
 Mineral exploration, recent, 39, 64, 70  
 Mineral Hill, 63, 64  
 Miners'  
   12-hour shifts, 102  
   wages, 23, 29, 41, 66, 94  
 Miners' Arms Hotel, West Mitchell, 111-12  
 Mines, gold  
   see Gold mines  
 Mines, silver  
   see Silver mines  
 Mitchell (Sunny Corner), proclaimed a township, 85-6, 108  
 Mitchell, J., 67

Mitchell, Sir Thomas Livingstone, 79, 108  
 Mitchell, West  
   see West Mitchell, and Mitchell's Creek  
 Mitchell's Creek  
   early gold discoveries at, 64-5  
   early settlement of, 79, 82  
   hotels at, 111-12  
   journey in 1866 to, 79  
   journey in 1884-5 to, 100, 101  
   naming of, 108  
   school, 139-44  
   school residence at, 139-41, 145  
   Union church at, 127-9, 159  
 Mockett, Isabella, 150  
 Monetary systems, 30-1  
 Money  
   comparative values of pounds and dollars, 41  
 Montana copper mine, 62  
 Monte Christo mine, 63, 67  
 Montgomery, W., 155  
 Mooney, 65  
 Moonlight Claim, 67  
 Moore, Dr. (Bathurst), 110  
 Moore, G.A., 67  
 Moore, T.J. (Rydal), 100  
 Moran, Michael, 146-7  
 Morgan, 1, 2  
 Morpeth, Mrs. G., 102, 159  
 Mort and Co., Sydney, 45, 55  
 Mount Blaxland, 181  
 Mount Genowlan, 174-5  
 Mount Horrible, 172  
 Mount Mitchell Silver Mining Co., 57  
 Mounter, 66  
 Mounter, James, 71  
 Munro's store, 161  
 Murphy, 67  
 Murray and Lean, 65-6  
 Murray, Charles, 66, 111, 112, 113, 115, 116  
 Murray, J.S., 67  
 Murray, James, 111  
 Murray, John, 123  
 Murray, Mary, 113, 116  
 Music teachers, listed, 163  
 Muswellbrook hotel, 122  
 Mynott, R., 17, 51, 52  
  
 N  
 N.S.W. and Qld. Manufacturing Co., 4, 16

N.S.W. Band and Albion Gold Mine, 65  
 National Trust of Australia  
   classification of Sunny Corner mine site by, 39  
 Native plants and animals  
   see Flora and Fauna  
 Naylor, Miss Mabel, 155  
 Nevada silver mine, Sunny corner, 16, 19, 34, 37, 50, 54-9  
   journey to, 58-9  
   worked for copper, 58  
 Nevada smelting furnace, 15  
 Nevada, U.S.A., 4, 15, 16  
 New Caledonia, 172, 175, 177  
 New Zealand  
   smelting in, 16  
 Newsagents, listed, 163  
 Newton brothers, 3  
 Newton, John, 4  
 Nicholas, W., 20, 44  
 Nicholl, F., 161  
 Nichols, Alfred, 155  
 Nichols, Miss Lily, 137

## O

O'Brien, Constable L.A., 133  
 O'Brien, Fr. Arthur, 129  
 O'Connor, Dan, 115  
 O'Dell, 66  
 O'Donnell, Miss, 130, 144  
 O'Dowd, Fr. John, 129  
 Occidental Minerals, 39  
 Odgers (gold miner), 66, 71  
 Odgers, Mrs. Charlotte, M., 135  
 Old, Trentham, 70, 71  
 On Sing and Co., 161  
 Open roasting  
   of silver ore, 22, 23, 29, 184  
   in 1917-22, 38  
   at Nevada mine, 58  
   of quartz, 65, 184  
 Orchids, native, 190  
 Ore, silver  
   oxidized, 21  
   sulphide, 21  
 Oregon timber, 38  
 Ossington, 71  
 Owen, William, 106-7

## P

Pacific Slope, U.S.A., 16  
 Pacific smelter  
   additional, 19, 45  
   first, 5-8, 14, 45

Paddy Lackey, 68, 195-6  
   gold mine, 68-70  
 Palmer's Oakey, 172-4, 205  
   "Warrie", 174  
 Palmer, William T.G., 163  
 Pardy, Dr., 110  
 Parmenter, Trevor, 150  
 Parrot pies, 167  
 Passeri, Jack and Bob, 203, 209  
 Passeri, Mrs., 203  
 Paterson, Donald, 135  
 Patton, William, 15  
 Payne, Edward, 159  
 Payne, Henry, 123, 157, 161  
 Payne's Drapery Emporium, 159  
 Peacock, Edward A., 139  
 Penman, Rev. James B., 126  
 Perry, Edwin, 155  
 Phoenix Silver Mining Co., 57  
 Photographers, listed, 163  
 Picnic race meetings, 103, 104, 117, 206  
 Pilliga hotel, 122  
 Pine plantation, 191-2  
 Pinnacles mine and smelter (Broken Hill), 15, 17  
 Piper's Flat  
   proposed tramway to, 101-2  
   road to Sunny Corner from, 101  
 Plants  
   see Flora  
 Police station, 132-3, 173  
 Police, list of, 133  
 Pollution, 71-8  
   of water supply to school, 146  
   see also Fumes  
 Port Augusta  
   smelter site, 16  
 Port Pirie  
   lead poisoning at, 75  
   smelter site, 16  
 Portland gold mining syndicate, 67  
 Portland  
   Bulkeley's store at, 93  
   church moved to, 127  
   horse and cart to, 201  
   hotel moved to, 119  
   drift from Sunny Corner to, 98, 165  
   road from Sunny Corner to, 169-70, 201  
   shopping expeditions to, 169-70  
 Possum trapping, 171, 204-5  
 Post offices  
   Dark Corner, 134, 138-9  
   Meadow Flat, 133

Mitchell's Creek, 133-4, 135-6  
   Sunny Corner, 135, 136-8  
 Power, M., 157  
 Poyitt, Miss Elizabeth, 144, 152  
 Poyitt, Norm, 69, 70  
 Preston, Constable (Ilford), 174  
 Price, 67  
 Price, Constable Jim, 133  
 Price, W., 157  
 Prince, H., 161  
 Probert smelter, 5, 14, 45  
 Prout, Mr., 55  
 Public reserves in 1989, 192  
   map 193  
 Public smelter, 38, 62-3  
 Pullen, Tim and Tom, 159  
 Purcell, Clothilda, 152  
 Purchase, Edward, 157  
 Pye, Mr., 198-9

## Q

Queensland  
   English mine in, 4  
 Queensland North  
   Ravenswood mine, 17  
 Quirk, 71

## R

Rabbits, 167, 186, 205  
 Racecourse, 104, 184, 194, 206-7  
   see also Horse racing  
 Radbourne (gold miner), 65  
 Radburne, N., 111  
 Radio  
   first in Sunny Corner, 166  
 Railway line from Sydney to Bathurst, 79  
 Rats and mice, 168, 187  
 Ravenswood mine  
   North Queensland, 17  
 Refining silver, 13  
 Refrigeration, 167  
 Reserves  
   map, 193  
   public (1989), 192  
 Reservoir  
   town, 47, 75, 146  
 Richards, Charles Henry, 53, 57  
 Rickard, 71  
 Rickard, W., 66  
 Rigby, 67  
 Rigby brothers, 157  
 Rigby, Mr. Arnold, 145  
 Riley, 67  
 Roads

from Sunny Corner to  
   Bathurst, 109  
   Meadow Flat, 79, 87, 100-1  
   Piper's Flat, 100-1  
   Portland, 169-70, 201  
   Rydal, 100-1  
   Yetholme (Frying Pan), 79, 101  
 tarring of Sunny Corner road, 171  
 Roasting of ore and quartz  
   see Open roasting  
 Roberts, Charles, 115, 120  
 Roberts, Miss Alice, 163  
 Roberts, Mr., 118  
 Roberts, Samuel, 66  
 Robertson, 67  
 Robertson, F., 65  
 Robson, Alan, 150  
 Rogers, 67  
 Roman Catholic church, 129-30  
 Rooke, James, 117  
 Ross, John, 139  
 Royal Exchange Hotel  
   Sunny Corner, 116-18  
 Royal Hotel  
   Capertee, 114  
   Lucknow, 120  
   Rydal, 100  
   Sunny Corner, 113-16  
 Royalties on smelters, 4-5, 15  
 Rushton, Joseph, 109-10  
 Russell, P.N., 127  
 Ryan, Edward, 148, 199-200, 206  
 Rydal, 3, 14  
   hotel at, 100  
   journey to Sunny Corner from, 100-1  
 Ryman, Billy, 206

## S

Saddlery, 163  
 Salkeld, J., 157  
 Salvation Army, 127, 146, 169  
 San Francisco  
   first Sunny Corner smelter from, 5  
   Melrose Works at, 17  
   visit by John Hurley to, 4  
 Saunders, Mavis, 155  
 Sawmill, 163  
 Schlapp, Herman (Broken Hill), 15  
 School residence  
   at Mitchell's Creek, 82, 109, 139-41, 145  
   at Sunny Corner, 144, 148-9  
   restoration of, 149  
   lobbing rocks on roof of, 201

School water supply, 146  
 Schooldays, 1920s, 170, 200  
 Schools  
   Catholic, 130, 144  
   Dark Corner, 150-5  
   evening, 127, 146  
   Mitchell's Creek, 139-43  
   private, 144  
   Sunny Corner, 139-50  
 Schoolteacher's salary, 141  
 Schumack  
   see Shumack  
 Scotch Church, 126-7  
 Scott brothers, 107  
 Scott, Constable (Rydal), 174  
 Scott, Drysdale, 196-8  
 Scott, Mac, 84  
 Scott, Mrs. Louise, 139  
 Scott, Thomas George, 139  
 Scott, Tom, 197  
 Scott's boarding house, 157  
 Sergeant Wright, 106, 132-3, 172-5  
 Shares in silver  
   drop in price of, 23  
   undervalued, 94  
 Shepherd, John, 3, 49, 60, 62, 65  
 Sheridan, Constable John Moore, 133, 199, 204-5, 206  
 Shipley, Thomas, 139  
 Shops  
   after 1900, 165-6  
   listed, 155-63  
 Shumack, 71  
 Shumack, Aiden, 130, 139  
 Shumack, G., 125  
 Shumack, George, 139, 145, 161  
 Shumack, John, 135, 161  
 Shumack, Mary Ann, 130  
 Shumack, Richard, 130, 139  
 Shumack, Samuel, 135  
 Shumack, Vera, 139  
 Silicosis, 76  
 Silver  
   investment in, 19, 13, 56, 94  
   price collapse 1892, 30-1, 58  
   price of, 31, 39-40  
   price rise, Second World War, 36  
   production figures for Sunny Corner mine, 39-41  
   used as monetary standard, 30-1  
   uses of, 13, 31  
   weekly escort of, 13  
 Silver Hill Co., 62, 63, 64  
 Silver King mine, 49-54

  description of first smelting at, 50-1  
   personnel, 17  
   sulphide problem at, 52-3  
   water supply to, 49-50  
 Silver mines  
   American, 16  
 Silver mines at Sunny Corner  
   larger mines  
     Great Western mine, 60  
     Nevada mine, 54-9  
     Silver King mine, 49-54  
     Sunny Corner silver mine, 1-49  
     Tonkin's mine, 61-2  
   smaller mines, 63-4  
   failure of, 20  
 Silver ore  
   description of, 21  
 Silver Prince Silver Mining Co., 63, 64  
 Silver Queen mine, 63-4  
   during second township, 91-3  
 Silver smelting  
   descriptions of, 9-13, 37-8, 50-1  
   difficulties in, 20-2  
   early American methods of, 4  
   early European methods of, 56-7  
   fluxes used in, 11-13, 47  
   modern methods of, 22  
 Silver Star Mine, 63, 64  
 Silver Street Hotel, 120  
 Silvertown, N.S.W., 15, 17  
 Simonds, Curly, 204-6  
 Simpkins, 152  
 Simpkins, J., 163  
 Sister Anthony, 130  
 Sister Benedicta, 130  
 Sister Imelda, 130  
 Sister James, 130  
 Sister John, 130  
 Sister Pius, 130  
 Sister Reginald, 130  
 Sister Winefride, 130  
 Sisters of St. Joseph, Perthville  
   at Sunny Corner, 130  
 Slag  
   retreatment of (1888), 26  
 Slattery, Mrs. 137  
 "Slippery Jack", bushranger, 172-7  
 Small, Constable A.R., 133  
 Smelters  
   air-jacket, 62  
   at Silver King mine, 50-1  
   at Sunny Corner silver mine, 4-5, 8-14, 26, 32, 37-8, 45  
   public smelter, 38, 62

  water-jacket, 13  
   see also Health and Pollution  
 Smelting of silver  
   see Silver smelting  
 Smith, 71  
 Smith, Eric, 155  
 Smith, J.M., 11, 44, 65  
 Smith, Mrs. Linda  
   re churches, 126, 127  
   re hospital, 108  
   re school, 148  
   re shops in 1910, 165  
 Smith, R., 71  
 Smith, Thomas, 139  
 Smith's mine, 63  
 Snape, John, 119  
 Sophies Soda Fountain, Portland, 170  
 Sorlies vaudeville show, 170  
 Sources of information  
   for Part I – The Mines, 78  
   for Part II – The Town, 177-9  
   for Part III – Environment, 194  
 Sparks, Bill (Wally), 155  
 Sparks (gold miner), 66  
 Sparks, newsagent, 163, 166  
 St. George gold mine, 70-1  
 St. George, Dr., 110  
 St. Mary's Catholic Church, Kirkconnell, 131-2  
 Stait, G., 67  
 Stait, George, 159  
 Stait, Jack, 199  
 Stait, Oscar, 207  
 Star Hotel, Sunny Corner, 118-19  
 Star Inn, West Mitchell, 111  
 Stearne (Stearns), J.H., 11, 17  
 Stephen, Surveyor, 91  
 Stephens, Rev. William J., 125  
 Stewart, Charles, 155  
 Stilwell, Lillian, 128  
 Stopping  
   square set method first used in Australia, 55  
 Storey, Frank, 150  
 Stories by Col Wilkinson, 195-209  
   By Horse and Cart on the Portland Road, 201  
   Calderbank, 200-1  
   Charleston and Gardner, 207-9  
   Cow Dung Fights, 204  
   Dances, The, 209  
   Dry Scott and his Bullock Team, 196-8  
   Farrelly, 200



Giant Tarantulas, 207  
 Horse Racing, 206-7  
 Lavatories on their Sides, 207  
 Mr. Pye, 198-9  
 Mrs. Passeri and the Yah-hoos, 203  
 Paddy Lackey, 195-6  
 Possum Trapper, The, 204-5  
 Poverty, 202  
 Rabbit Duffing, 205-6  
 Sheridan and Ryan, 199-200  
 Tom Fitz, 201-2  
 Tragedy, 202-3  
 Stratford, Charles, 157  
 Stratford, Mrs., 159  
 Strickland family, 202  
 Strickland, George jnr., 197, 202-3  
 Strickland, George snr., 202  
 Strikes  
   1885 and 1886, 23  
 Sulphide problem, 20-3  
   at Broken Hill, 21, 22  
   at Silver King mine, 21, 52  
   at Sunny Corner mine, 21, 22, 34  
   solution for, 22  
 Sulphur  
   drifting clouds of, 19, 22, 23, 75  
 Summons, E., 159  
 Sunny Corner mine historic reserve, 39, 192  
   map, 193  
 Sunny Corner Progress Committee, 34, 44  
 Sunny Corner Silver Mining Company  
   decline of, 33  
   formation of, 5  
 Sunny Corner silver mine, 1-49  
   as Historic Site reserve, 39, 192  
   map, 193  
   brief history, vi, vii  
   classified by National Trust, 39  
   description of above ground workings, 44-7  
   description of first smelting at, 9-11  
   description of works (1917-22), 37-8  
   first successful smelting of silver in Australia at, 11, 13-14  
   gold content of, 2, 39-41  
   ground collapse (1885), 19  
   list of mine managers and leaseholders, 44  
   map of surface installations, 42-3  
   map of underground workings, 6-7  
   production figures of, 39-41  
   recent exploration of minerals at, 38  
   supply of water to, 47-9

Sunny Corner township  
   brief history, vi, vii  
   drift to Portland from, 98, 165  
   early descriptions of, 82-99  
   early journeys to, 79, 87, 100-1  
   in 1980s, 172  
   lifestyle, 1920s to 1950s, 165-72  
   naming of, 85-6, 107-8  
   planned second township of, 91-3  
   proclaimed a township, 86, 108  
   shops and businesses listed, 155-63  
   see also Churches, Hotels, Schools,  
   Post Offices  
 Sunnyside Syndicate, 44  
 Sure Gift mine, 71  
 Surprise parties, 170  
 Swain, Stephen William, 110  
 Swansea (Wales), 58

**T**  
 Tailors and dressmakers, listed, 163  
 Tasker, Thomas William, 116-17  
 Tasker's Lode, 63, 64  
 Tattersall, Jack, 116  
 Tattersall, M., 163  
 Tattersall, Mrs., 116  
 Tattersall's Hotel, Sunny Corner, 122-3  
 Tattham (bank manager), 106-7  
 Taylor, Mr., 17  
 Teachers  
   see Schools  
 Telephone, 137, 138, 171  
 Television, 171-2  
 Tennis, 105, 121, 150, 192  
 Thomas (gold miner), 67  
 Thomas, Benjamin, 122  
 Thomas, Mrs., 163  
 Thomas, Rev. John, 126  
 Thompson, Mr. (mine owner 1885), 54  
 Thompson, Mr. (owner of "Warrie" 1890s), 174  
 Thompson's Creek, 180  
 Thomson, Charles, 142  
 Timber  
   for water tanks, 48-9  
   used at mines, 38  
   see also Trees  
 Timber merchants, listed, 163  
 Titus, Jack, 115  
 Tobacconists, listed, 163  
 Tobin, Thos., 161  
 Toilets  
   old-style, 168, 207  
 Tomkinson, L.A., 137

Tonkin, James Ebenezer, 61-2  
 Tonkin's mine, 61-2  
 Town common, 185-6, 194, 200  
 Township  
   see Sunny Corner township, and  
   Mitchell's Creek  
 Toyer, 67  
 Transport  
   1920s to 1950s, 169-70  
   bringing machinery to mine (1880s), 5, 14  
   by pushbike to Sydney (1920s), 169  
   carting homes to Portland by horse wagon, 165  
   carting hotels by bullock wagon, 112, 114  
   first car built in N.S.W., 169  
   taking injured miner to Bathurst, 109  
   trains, 79  
   see also Bullock teams, Roads  
 Travelling performers, 104  
   circuses, 119  
 Treehy, J.H., 147  
 Trees  
   cleared from racecourse, 184, 194, 206-7  
   clearing of, 65, 91, 184-5  
   eucalyptus oil distilleries, 171, 184-5  
   firewood cutting 1920s-50s, 167  
   fumes killing, 72, 73, 75, 184  
   list of native species, 189-90  
   local history of, 184-5  
   pine trees, 191-2  
   tan bark collecting, 184, 197  
   used underground in mine, 26, 38, 184  
 Trewenack, W.H., 29, 44, 66  
 Tribute system, 31-2  
 Turner, 66  
 Turpin's Gully, 67

**U**  
 Underground map of Sunny Corner mine, 7-8  
 Undertakers, listed, 163  
 Union church  
   West Mitchell, 127-9

**V**  
 Varley, John, 86, 87, 113-15  
 Varley, Matilda, 113, 115  
 Varley, W., storekeeper, 115  
 Varley's Stores, 115, 161  
 Vegetation, native  
   list of species, 189-91

see also Trees  
 Vellenoweth, Mrs., 144  
 Victoria gold mine  
   see Great Victoria gold mine

Victoria Hall, 118, 119, 152  
   see also Hall, community  
 Victoria Silver Mining Co., 63, 64  
 Volunteer Defence Corps of Second World War, 171

**W**  
 Wages of miners, 23, 41, 66, 94  
   12-hour shifts, 102  
   contract system, 29  
 Wages of schoolteacher, 141  
 Wakeford and Wylie, 159  
 Walker, Charles R., 121  
 Walker, Rev. Joseph, 125  
 Walker, Robert, 155  
 Walsh, Cornelius, 120  
 Walsh, Father, 129  
 Walsh, Rev. Mathias P., 129  
 "Warrie", Palmer's Oakey, 174  
 Washing days, 1920s-50s, 168  
 Water supply  
   acid water in mine tunnels, 76  
   pollution of, 75, 146  
   to hospital, 108  
   to school, 146  
   to Silver King mine, 49  
   to Sunny Corner mine, 47-9  
   to town and mines, 47-9  
   town reservoir, 47, 75, 146

Waters and Graves, 63  
 Watts Hairdressing Saloon, 161  
 Watts, Charlie, 157, 161  
 Watts, Dr., 67, 110  
 Watts, Ebenezer, 142  
 Waugh, W.S. newsagency, 163  
 Wee Jean gold mining syndicate, 67  
 Weinert (gold miner), 67  
 Weinert, Ludwig Adolphus jnr. (Alf), 119  
 Weinert, Ludwig Adolphus snr., 118-19  
 Weinert, Mary, 118  
 Weinert's Star Hotel, Sunny Corner 118-19

Wesleyan Church  
   against alcohol, 103  
   at Meadow Flat, 123, 125  
   at Sunny Corner, 123, 124-6  
 West Mitchell, 82  
   church, 127-9  
   general store 1930s, 145

general store 1989, 82  
 naming of, 108  
 school residence, 82, 109, 139-41,  
 145  
 see also Mitchell's Creek  
 Wheen, Rev. Harold, 125  
 White, Miss Mary, 144, 145  
 Whitely, R., 57  
 Wilkinson, Col, 37  
     at Paddy Lackey mine, 70  
     re church, 126  
     re flue dust, 38  
     re hospital, 108  
     re mercury and cyanide poisoning,  
     77-8  
     recounting life in the 1920s-50s,  
     166-71  
     stories by, 195-209  
     see also Stories  
 Wilkinson, Jack, 37  
     re Sunny Corner mine (1917-22), 37-8  
 Wilkinson, Lance, 37, 169  
 Wilkinson, Lionel, 36-7, 70  
 Wilkinsón, Walter B., 36-7, 45, 48, 58  
 Williams, 71  
 Williams, Slogger Bill, 115  
 Wilson, Rev., 126  
 Winburndale Nature Reserve, 180, 183  
 Winburndale Range, 173  
 Windradyne, 180-2  
 Winters and Morgan, 1-2  
 Wiradjuri tribe, 180-3  
 Wireless, 166  
 Woodgate, E.W., 44  
 Woodsford family, 116  
 Woolmer, John, 123  
 Working Men's Club, 137  
 World War I  
     effect on Sunny Corner mine, 35, 36  
 World War II, 171  
 Worrall, 71  
 Wright, George, 38-9, 44  
 Wright, Mary, 38-9, 44  
 Wright, Sergeant, 106, 132-3, 172-5

## Y

Yetholme,  
     road from Sunny Corner to, 79, 101  
 Yorkey's Claim, 65

## Z

Zinc  
     problems with, 22, 34  
 Zinc Corporation, 35, 58

Zobel, 66  
 Zobel, M., 71



Unlike many of the old ghost towns around Bathurst which had grown up around gold mines, Sunny Corner was a town which owed its existence to silver. And such was the faith of the speculators in the size of the silver deposit, that they believed Sunny Corner was destined to become a large industrial city. The town population did reach over 4,000, but after only a few years, the mine – and the town – began to fade. The population drifted away and even the town itself was dismantled. Sunny Corner never really became a ghost town – by the 1940s virtually the whole township had been removed, piece by piece, elsewhere. And all that remains of the once prosperous silver mine is an eroded hillside and a lone brick chimney-stack.

This book attempts to recreate the unique history of Sunny Corner, from the earliest gold discoveries at Mitchell's Creek in the 1850s and 1860s, to the "silver rush" of the 1880s, when Sunny Corner silver mine became the first place in Australia to smelt silver successfully. From prosperous mining town to small rural community – the years from the 1880s to the 1980s have been comprehensively covered. An environmental history of the area has also been given, and there are some entertaining yarns written by Col Wilkinson about some of Sunny Corner's more colourful characters of the 1920s and 1930s.

The book contains 224 pages, including some 100 historic photographs.

The author:

Vicki Powys is a landscape artist who has lived at Sunny Corner for almost 20 years. For the last 12 months, however, Vicki has abandoned her paintbrushes and has been busy instead at the typewriter, writing about the history of Sunny Corner. Prior to this, several years of research were done, entailing numerous visits to the Mitchell Library, laborious scanning of old newspapers, a frustrating search for old photographs and much delving into many and various old records on Sunny Corner.

*Cover picture:*

Royal Hotel, Sunny Corner–

as it appeared in 1977. Built in 1884, this picturesque old building was destroyed by fire in 1979.

Drawn by the author (oil pastel and pencil on grey paper)