

History

The Wool And Sheep Industry



For Upper Primary

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Preview

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Development of the Sheep Industry 1

The first flocks of sheep in the colony were used for meat and not for their fleece. In 1797 John Macarthur and other landowners introduced Spanish merino sheep into New South Wales. By 1805 Macarthur was the biggest landowner in the colony and his 5,000-acre property at Camden Park on the Nepean River had over 4,000 almost pure merino sheep. The sheep had adapted well to the hot climate and produced exceptional wool that was exported to Europe. Elizabeth Macarthur (see image right) had always taken a keen interest in the flocks and ran the sheep farms capably when her husband John was absent for lengthy periods from the colony and after his death in 1834.



Wikimedia Commons

Inland explorers such as Hume, Hovell, Oxley, Sturt and Mitchell reported back to the Colonial Office about the new areas of pastoral land that they had discovered. Settlers and squatters reacted to the news by quickly occupying large tracts of land for sheep grazing. By the end of the 1830s, the sheep industry had been established in every Australian colony (see timeline).

Transporting Wool to the Market

After shearing, farmers had to transport their fleece in bales to markets. This was made easier as transport systems began to improve in the colonies. Firstly, the bales were loaded on to bullock drays and driven over rough roads to a wharf on the Murray River. The bales were kept in wool stores until paddle steamers transported them along the river to the ports of Adelaide and Melbourne. The river boats picked up bales, transported passengers and delivered supplies and mail to people waiting at wharves along the river. This system was so efficient that many

of the wool producers of New South Wales preferred to ship their bales via the Murray to Melbourne, rather than by bullock dray to Sydney. In 1874 there were 240 boats using the port at Echuca each week. The wool was then shipped to European markets on "clippers." These ships were faster than other sailing ships. A voyage to England could take as little as ten weeks, instead of seven months.

The first steam railways began operating in New South Wales and Victoria in the late 1850s. This was important for the sheep industry because rail transport was faster. It also meant the beginning of the end for Murray River boat trade.

Growth of the Sheep Industry

1788	Port Jackson, Sydney
1803	Van Diemen's Land
1815	Bathurst district
1824	Moreton Bay, Brisbane
1829	Swan River, Perth
1837	Port Phillip Bay, Melbourne
1838	Adelaide

Activity

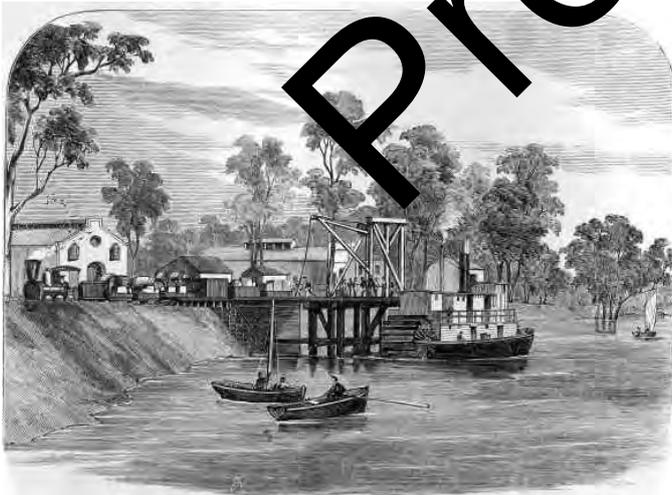
Development of the Sheep Industry 2

- Use the information on page 3 to sequence the process of transporting wool to the markets. The first one has been done for you.

Bales were stacked in wool stores near the wharf until the boat's arrival.	
Clippers transported the wool to overseas markets.	
Steam railways were to provide a faster way of transporting wool bales.	
The fleece was sorted and pressed into wool bales of about 110 kilograms.	1
River boats transported the wool bales along the river to shipping ports.	
Bullocks, horses or camels transported the wool by drays to river ports.	

Echuca Wharf

- Look at the image of Echuca Wharf (1864), then answer the questions.



State Library Of Victoria

1. How were wool bales loaded onto the river boats?

2. Why can the wharf's pylons be easily seen in this image?

3. Who else might be waiting at the Echuca Wharf and why?

The Economy and the Sheep Industry 1

The wool produced in the Australian colonies was bought in increasing volume by Britain. The first auction of Australian wool took place at Garraway's Coffee House in London in 1821. These auctions attracted buyers from as far away as Japan. In 1843 Thomas Sutcliffe Mort held the first regular wool auctions in Sydney. Demand for the fine merino wool was so great that manufacturers of textiles from France and Belgium set up permanent offices in the colony so that they could buy directly from the wool producers.

The wool was manufactured into goods in British factories and sold all over the world. This was very profitable for Britain. The Australian colonies prospered economically as well and important decisions concerning their future began to be made.

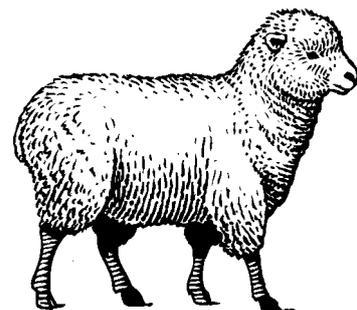
Changes in Colonial Life in the Late 19th Century

- In 1852 self-government was granted to the colonies. There was a general feeling that if the colonies co-operated more with each other, services like the post, transport and trade could be improved for all colonists.
- British troops left the colonies and convict transportation ended in 1868.
- The colonies advertised for migrants. Australia's population grew from 430,000 in 1851 to 1.7 million in 1871. Rural towns sprang up with impressive colonial buildings. Universities were established in Sydney and Melbourne.
- The Suez Canal was opened in 1872. Wool and other colonial products could be shipped faster to Europe. It also made migration easier and safer.

The expression "riding on the sheep's back" describes how the wool industry supported the economy of the new colonies. In a short time, people saw a big improvement in their standard of living. Sheep grazing was to expand steadily in the 19th century despite the effects of devastating droughts, floods and economic recessions.

The Courier, Hobart 1856

FOR SALE extensive sheep-run on Fiery Creek known as YALLA-Y-PORRA. 65,000 acres and 29,000 sheep and capable of carrying double that number. As a proof of the quality of the wool clipped this season, the Agents are authorised to state that it has been sold at 1 shilling 6 pence per lb. for £10,000 cash.



- Complete the diagram with bullet-point notes. Use the information on page 5.

Benefits of the colonies' sheep-grazing industry

for Britain

for the Australian colonies

1. What evidence is there in the advertisement for the sale of the Yalla-Y-Porra sheep farm near Hobart, that it was a valuable property?

2. How do we know that wool produced in Australia was of very high quality?

3. In your own words explain what the expression "riding on the sheep's back" means.

The Shearers' Strike 1

As the sheep industry boomed so did the number of shearers. The image of a swagman tramping along a bush track and sleeping under the stars has become an icon of Australian culture. Being a shearer was not always easy. They had to travel from station to station to find work. Woolsheds could be noisy, suffocating places, particularly during the summer heat that could reach 50°C. Sheds were often infested with lice as was the basic lodging given to the men. To earn £1, a shearer had to take the fleece off 100 sheep. He had to obey the boss's woolshed rules or he risked not receiving his wages. A shearer's day was spent bent over sheep for hours with clippers in hand. As many as 80 men could be on a shearing floor at one time.



National Library of Australia

A shearer

In 1890 the Shearers' Union had many thousands of members and was negotiating for better pay and conditions. When shearers from the Jondaryan woolshed in Queensland went on strike, employers called in non-union labour to do the job. Dock workers from the Rockhampton wharves supported their fellow unionists and refused to load the wool from Jondaryan. However, pastoralists did not give up. They formed the Pastoralists' Federal Council and continued with their push for a contract of "free labour". This gave the employers the freedom to select their own workers. The Shearers' Union wanted only union workers in the woolsheds.

WOOLSHED RULES

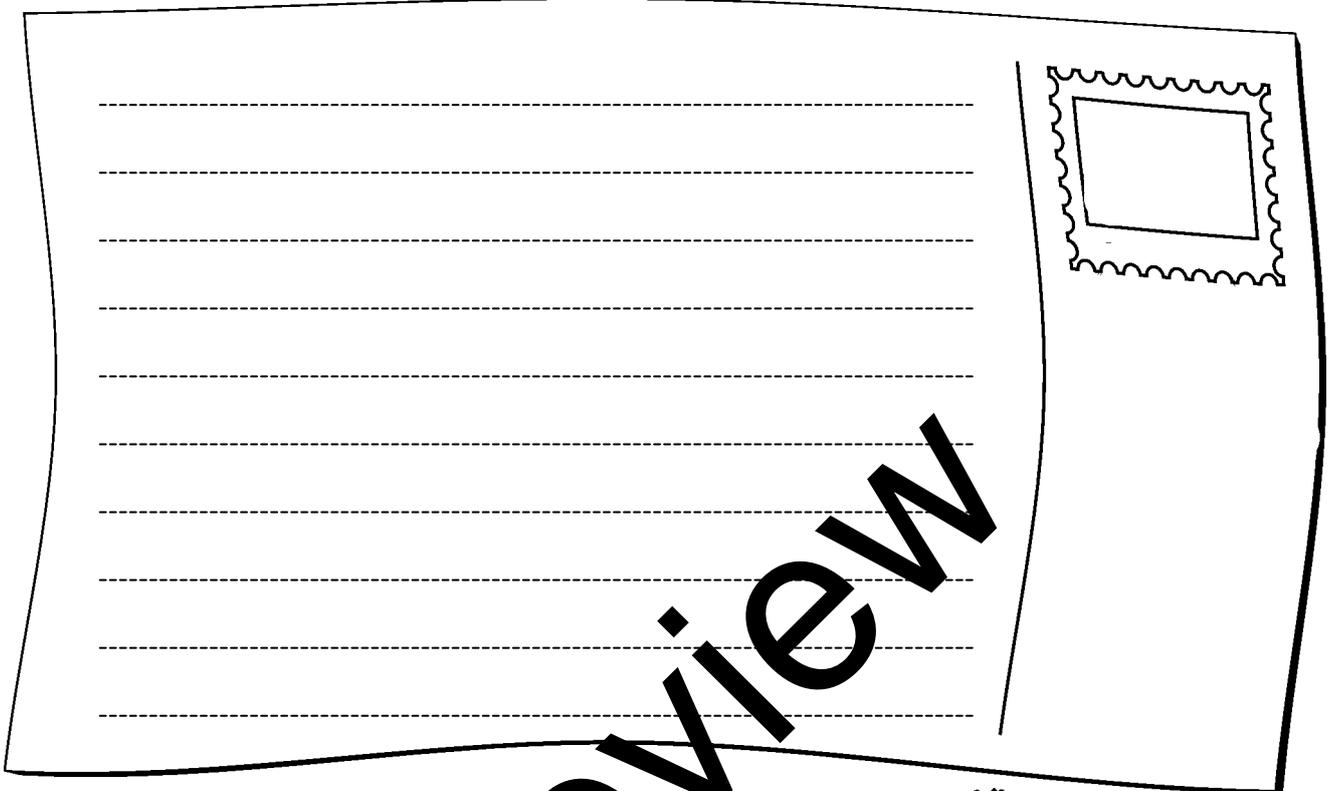
- Working hours to be mutually agreed on.
- Employers will choose their own shearers.
- Ewes are to be carried from the pens to the shed.
- No swearing or singing during working hours. Smoking at intervals only.
- Cut or nicked sheep are to be treated immediately.
- Dismissed shearers will pay back £1 per week for food and board.
- Shearers' tallies to be posted each morning. Any objections must be made at this time only.

During 1891 shearers on various sheep stations put down their shears and went on strike. Clashes occurred between shearers and non-union labour that had been called in to work by pastoralists. Angry shearers set fire to grazing pastures, tore down fences and torched woolsheds and houses. It was feared that a civil war could break out after shearers and unionists were arrested and jailed. Many striking shearers were penniless and hungry. In August 1891, the Shearers' Union and Pastoralists' Union signed an agreement. Surprisingly, the agreement permitted pastoralists to employ the workers they wanted – union or non-union. From this struggle, however, the Australian Labor Party took root. The workers felt their rights could only be protected through political representation.

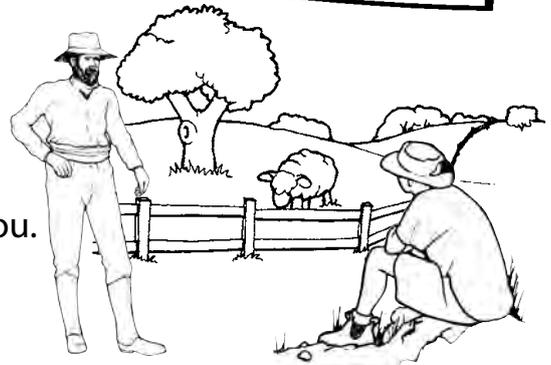
Activity

The Shearers' Strike 2

- Imagine that you are a young shearer working on a sheep station in the 19th century. Write "a postcard from the woolshed" to your family. Use the information on page 7 and your senses to describe what a shearer's life was like.



- What were the causes of the Shearer's Strike in 1891? Write down arguments from both the shearers' and the pastoralists' points of view. Read the "Woolshed Rules" on page 7 to help you.



Pastoralists' case	Shearers' case

1. Were the "Woolshed Rules" fair in your opinion?
Choose two examples to justify your answer.



Example 1 _____

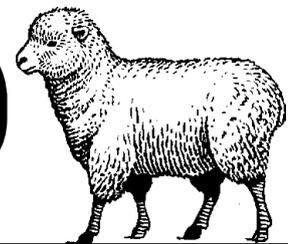
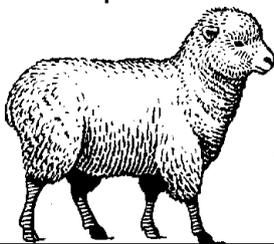
Example 2 _____

2. Why do you suppose the Shearers' Union finally agreed to the demands of the pastoralists for a free labour contract?

Discuss this question with a partner:

What if the Shearers' Union had not signed an agreement to end the strike in 1891?

Fill in the possible **consequences** with the ideas that you have discussed.



If the Shearers had continued their strike ...

Page 4

(1) The fleece was sorted into 110 kilogram bales. (2) Transported to rivers ports by drays. (3) Bales stacked in wool stores until boat's arrival. (4) River boats transported bales to ports. (5) Clippers transported wool overseas. (6) Steam railways were to become a faster form of transportation.

1. With cranes (pulleys). 2. The water level of the river is quite low. 3. People waiting for mail, to pick up visitors or boat passengers.

Page 6

BRITAIN: fleece from Australia was made into goods that were sold all over the world; provided factory jobs for the British. AUSTRALIA: provided money to develop the colonies (roads, bridges, schools, transport networks); provided jobs; attracted more people to migrate. 1. The farm had the capacity to double its production; wool was sold at a good price; cash sale only. 2. Buyers came from as far away as Japan; Europeans set up offices to buy wool in Australia. 3. The expression means that the Australian economy relied heavily on the wool industry.

Page 7

Pastoralists' case: freedom to choose shearers; to dismiss workers not up to employers' standards; shearers to negotiate working hours. Shearers' case: employment of union labour only; better pay; better working conditions in the shearing sheds.

Page 8

1. Student's opinion. 2. Many striking shearers were hungry and penniless; pastoralists found non-union labour to do the shearing. Possible consequences: civil war might have broken out; the strikers could have been arrested; more properties might have been destroyed; the growth of the wool industry could have been affected.