

The Emu, Australia's national bird. In full plumage it is one of the handsomest of the flightless birds, and bears a fine ruff of feathers about its neck.

From
Hopetoun, Victoria.
Australia.

to
Inkpen
England.

Kind wishes to you all.

1940

Box 40

Hopetoun

Victoria

Australia

23-5-40

Dear Fellow Member,

I am writing to you from a country town in the Mallee district of Victoria. I lived for over forty years on our farm six miles from the town, but have recently come to live in Hopetoun.

The Mallee is a country of plains, or slightly undulating land. It is called the "Mallee" after a small species of Eucalyptus, the Mallee trees, which are the chief vegetation of the part in its wild state. Now the landscape is rolling wheat fields, divided from one another by lines of Mallee trees, and Mallee trees also line the roads.

The Mallee, in common with other eucalypts, has one property which is not known by many Australians of the cities. Its green leaves can be used to light a roaring fire, for they are

full of eucalyptus oil. The bark also
is good kuding.

I am now going to tell you of
two experiences of my life in the early
days on the farm.

The stock in this part of the world
are watered from "dams", which are
really depressions scooped out in the earth
of about one thousand cubic yards
capacity, which are filled in spring by
channels from the irrigation systems, or
from rainfall. Once when I was left
alone on the farm, except for a lad of
fourteen, a horse got deep into the dam,
and became stuck in the mud. The boy
did not know what to do, and neither
would I have done, if it had not been
that only a fortnight before, I had
seen my husband help a neighbour in
the same emergency. I harnessed a horse
and, having placed a chain around the
neck of the one in the dam, which
meant my going waistdeep into the
water, I fastened it to the other horse
and so pulled it out, and saved a
valuable animal.

The other experiences of which I am about to tell you illustrates, not my fore thought, but my foolishness.

I was washing outside in two big tubs, when in the long grass just near me, I saw a snake. To fetch it out, I lit the grass, which at once began to blaze, and crackle, and I realised that in an instant it would have spread into the dry standing crop of wheat nearby. So I seized the tub of water, which at any other time I could not have lifted, and threw clothes and all over the fire. Luckily for me, and for our pockets had the wheat been burnt, the fire was almost extinguished, and the men, who returned just then for their dinner, put it out safely.

Of course, that is many years ago, and things are not so primitive now. Now we have water laid on, and proper washing accommodation.

The war news is serious, at present. I do hope that you are not in a place of danger. We in Australia are lucky to be so far removed

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from the main conflict, though I do
Australian men will be doing their
it overseas. Australian women are
working hard for the various auxiliaries
to help supply comforts, and forward
war work in general, and we can only
hope that right will conquer might.

I am

your sincerely
A fellow member of C.W.A
E. E. Giles.



All
typical
scenes
on
farms
situated
around
Hopetoun
in the
Mallee.
Northern
Victoria



The Mallee Hen

In the north west corner of Victoria lies a dry area known as the Mallee so named from a dwarf eucalyptus which covers the plains.

In this Mallee country is found a unique bird called the Mallee Hen or Pheasant. This bird, like some snakes, leaves its eggs to be hatched by artificial heat.

The birds are a little larger than a rooster though, perhaps of slighter build. & their mottled grey and black coloring harmonizes with the light and shade of their surroundings.

As they are very shy, they are seldom seen. Sometimes they can be surprised around the nest.

Their food consists of insects, berries, and buds of small scrubs. They roost in the trees when it is almost dark.

The birds have a large nesting mound which looks like a heap of sand tipped out of a drag. When the birds have selected a site for the mound, they scrape out a slight hollow about 6 to 8 inches deep, in the centre, & 2 feet wide. Next they scrape up leaves, (bits) bits of bark, leaves & other vegetation and put on enough sand not only to fill the depression but to

make a mound of it above the level of the surrounding country. Then they form a hollow in the centre of the ^{vegetation} (depression) and this forms the egg chamber and they leave this open until the rains come. After the rains, the sand is scraped well over the mound and the whole is left for a few days until it becomes heated.

These hillocks or mounds have been measured. They vary in circumference but the average measurement is about 36 feet. The nest is generally made in July or August, that being winter and our rainy season. The nest being ready for the eggs, the hen bird scratches out most of the sand from the egg cavity, leaving about 2 inches in the bottom. She then lays her egg and holding it upright with one foot, small end downwards, scrapes the sand around it with the other foot until it will stand alone. The egg cavity has to be scraped out and refilled every time an egg is laid, giving much work to the parent bird. The eggs are usually placed at the outer edge of the chamber and one often in the centre. The first eggs are covered with about 2 inches of sand and a second tier

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the interspace of the lower lot. There are generally three tiers, with from three to five eggs in each, and a full clutch is about 14 eggs.

The temperature in these cavities is about 95° .

The eggs are laid at daybreak on every third morning and incubation takes a little over five weeks. As incubation starts as soon as the eggs are laid, the young are ready to hatch at different times.

The eggs are a delicate pink colour.

There has been much discussion as to whether the young ones can make their own way out of the soil unaided by the parent bird. On one occasion when digging out a Mallard hen's nest a chick ran out when I had taken out a few shovel-fuls out. The old bird opens up the nest daily to a certain extent at daybreak and it is thought that any chick from the lower tiers that are ready to come out do so then; but the chicks that hatch from the eggs of the top tier, the sand there not being set so tightly and being drier and running more freely are able to force their own way out.

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One of the wonders of the bird world—
the nesting mound of the Mallee Fowl
(*Leipoa ocellata*), a natural incubator in
which the eggs are hatched by the heat
of decaying vegetable matter. This
mound is complete and contains a full
complement of eggs, which are deposited
in tiers in a special incubating chamber.
In the photo above the nesting chamber
of the Mallee Fowl opened to show the
eggs in situ.

writing of life on a Malbee farm in the pioneering days, & giving briefly, some particulars and episodes which fell to my lot.

It was hard both for the men-folk & their wives, & we had many difficulties to contend with. Some of the main problems which had to be faced were the lack of water & no made roads to the township; the roads in those days were just winding tracks.

Rising at 5 o'clock to get breakfast which had to be substantial & hot, I would give the menfolk their meal, as the horses would have to have one hour's feed, then be harnessed, & the men would be away.

I would call the children about a quarter to seven. (I had five at the time of which I am writing.) While they were dressing I would milk not less than two

cows sometimes more. While the children had breakfast I cut the lunches + saw that they were properly ready for school. Then I would get the pony + drive them three miles to their school, taking the two youngest with me. When I returned home + put away the buggy + pony I would get the men's lunch ready, then separate the milk. It was a big fly round to get the beds made + the ready with a hot dinner for the men when they returned at mid-day. When that was over + dishes + separator washed - it was lunch time again. I had no idle time as I washed twice a week + did all the sewing for the family of four boys + one girl. As I mentioned before, water was a big problem. We had to depend on the rainfall. If the catchment was good we

would get the dam full, but if it was a drought we would have to cart water. Some bags would be filled with straw & these would be placed on the bottom of the waggon. The tanks, which contained 400 gallons when filled, rested on this bed of bags. It would take five horses to pull the load when coming home.

The water would be run into troughs to give the stock a drink. Some of the animals had come many miles to get a drink. All other water had to be carted for domestic purposes, though we had tanks at the house for drinking water.

I remember one very hot day we had a caller & Dad asked him to stay for dinner. We were nearly finished when a big brown snake thought it would be cooler indoors. Dad saw him in time & killed

him & then threw him away from the house as he intended removing him altogether when he went out to get a horse. The horse was brought in & put in the trolley & just as Dad was turning the horse round he saw the snake & jumped about two feet in the air! It gave him more fright dead than it had done alive.

I'm sending some snaps - one will show you the tanks on the waggon & one shows the horses drinking at the dam when it was full. We must have had a good rain then.

The mallee is wonderful as it responds so quickly to a good rain. It is the end of August now & we have only had four inches of rain this year. The wheat looks nice & green but rain is urgently needed or we will be having no harvest. The 1914 drought was terrible.

There was no water & fodder was scarce. The stock suffered, & we lost cattle horses & sheep.

Now there are channels running through the mallee, & the dams are filled once a year. With the more modern method of farming there is not so much fodder heeded, as not so many horses are used.

Last year my boys had over 200 tons of hay. It is lovely to see the fine big stacks.

My family are all reared now. My daughter is married, & lives twenty eight miles from me. She is on a modern farm. She sometimes talks of the time when Mum had to drive them all to school.

With the coming of the motor car we got good made roads, & then we bought a quiet pony, & the children could go off by themselves in safety.

One son is married & is living
five miles from me; & one is in the
A. I. F. The youngest boy is
carrying on the farm as I have
lost my husband now.

We were all very happy & had
good health in those hard years.
I hope I have told you
something interesting about my
life which has always been a
busy one.

My eldest boy has a good
position as Shire Secretary of
the Karroo Shire. He goes
into Hopetoun each morning
by car.

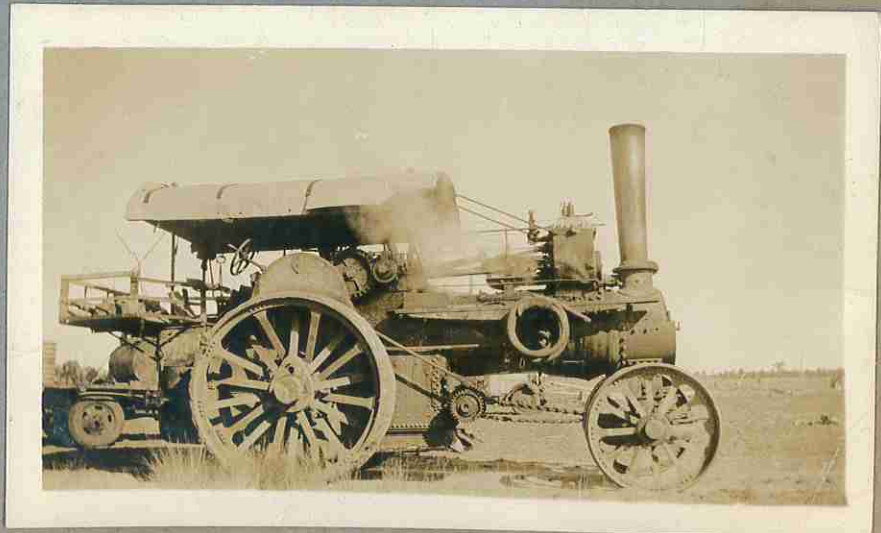
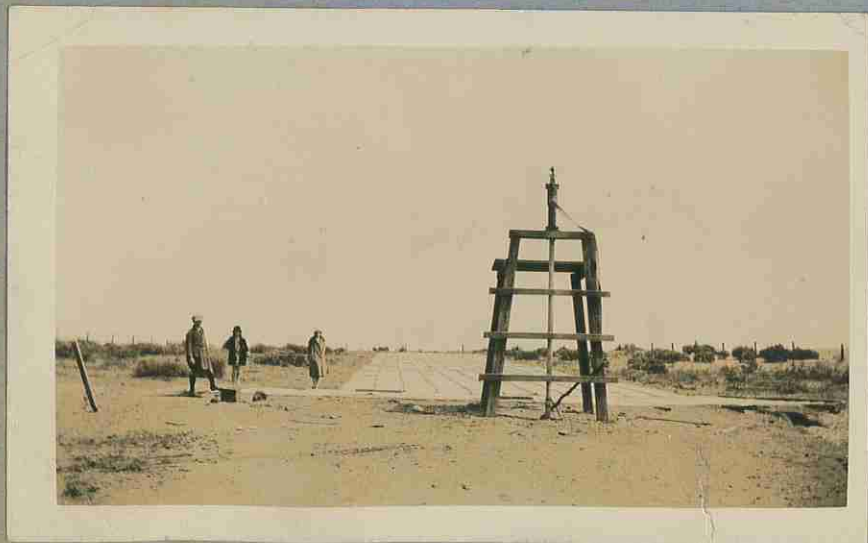
I don't think folk are any
happier in the present time than
we were, even with the help of
the modern machinery cars &
trucks to make life easier.



Swing up the
bags of wheat.



A wayside
water
supply on
left.

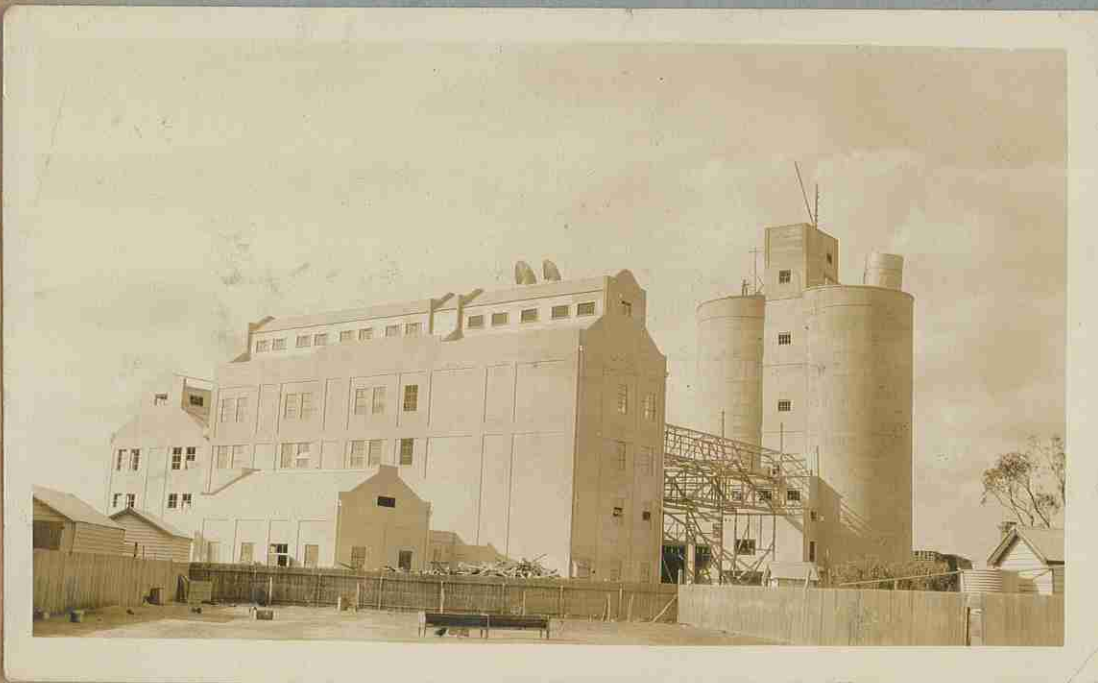




Farm buildings.



Hopetoun School ground.



Flour mills at a nearby town.



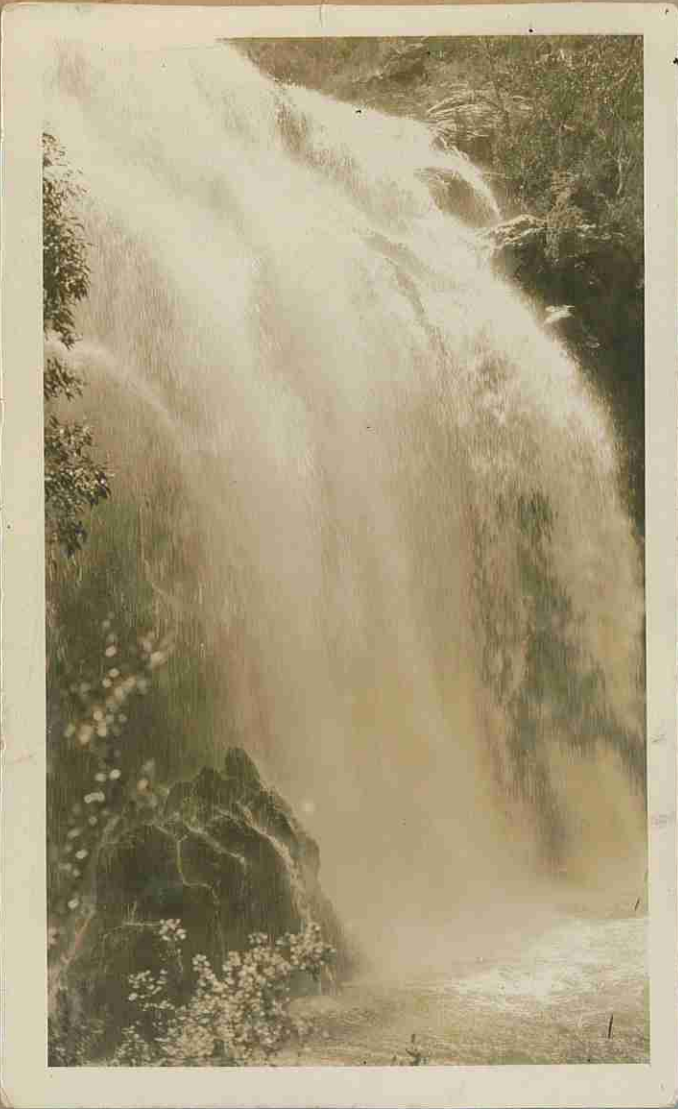
Hopetoun Methodist Church
Parsonage.



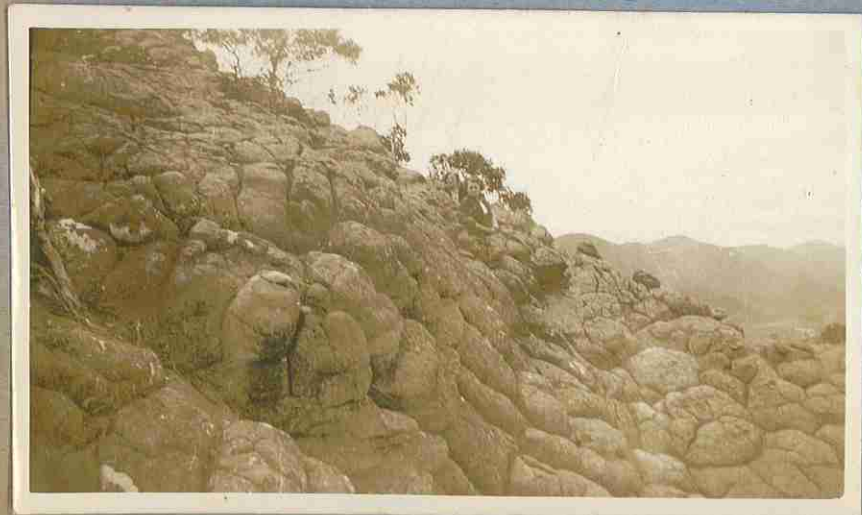
Typical Australian
scenes.

Bales of wool on their
way to the cities.





Taken at
the
Crampian
mountains
100 miles
from
Hopetoun.





moving day!

