

**Developing an Index for
'Exploration and Settlement in Australia',
by the Honorable James Gormly, M.L.C**

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James Gormly (1836–1922)

(Morris, 1999.p. 52)

Introduction

I am a fourth year Bachelor of Education (Primary) student and my personal interest, in history and former times, was ignited during my studies at University. Human Society and its Environment (H.S.I.E.) is a Key Learning Area of New South Wales primary schools, and history is a major focus in this subject. I researched an area of Wagga Wagga, looking at it's past, present and future during my studies of H.S.I.E. It was whilst researching the history of the Market Place block that I developed my quest for knowledge about the past. I became fascinated with finding out the facts and truth of the past and I started looking at the things around me in a different way; a more connected way. It was with this new 'thirst' for historical knowledge I applied for the Summer Scholarship at the Archives. Since I have read James Gormly's book, I have unearthed a multitude of facts, anecdotes and information that would have been invaluable to my peers and myself during our studies. This book is significant as a valuable source for local history, especially Wagga Wagga and it's environs, as well as other parts of Australia.

James Gormly

James Gormly was an Irish immigrant who arrived in Australia in 1840 with his parents and five siblings aged four years old. Patrick Gormly, James' father, had contacts in Australia when they arrived which helped the family settle quickly. Farming was the main occupation of settlers and James learnt his stockman skills at an early age. Riding horses was a talent the young James had an aptitude for. He was included on long droving trips with his father's cattle when he was eight or nine years old. During these overland journeys his tracking ability developed and he was able to locate most of their cattle if they had strayed or stampeded.

He was not an educated man and did not attend a formal school, despite that he had a rounded education from his parents, who home schooled their children. Gormly remembers his mother giving them lessons and reading Charles Dickens' 'Pickwick Papers' around the fire in the evenings. Gormly experienced many tragic events in his life, the most devastating in June 1852 when most of his family were drowned during a mighty flood. The town of Gundagai was washed away and a hundred and eighty four people lost their lives that day. Gormly and his older brother Thomas survived by climbing a tree. Gormly did not have much luck in the goldfields, he and his brother spent time establishing a claim at the Woolshed on the Ovens

River, Victoria only to abandon it without success. On their return from Bendigo, a year later, they found a large 'canvas and calico town erected' (Gormly, p.184). They were told that the exact spot they had worked previously 'had proved the richest spot on the creek.'

Gormly became the foundation president of the Wagga Wagga Free Selectors' Association in 1875, which was the start of his political career. It was when he was Member for the Murrumbidgee in the Legislative Assembly from 1885 that his name started appearing in the newspapers. The oldest, dated, inclusion in the book was a letter written to Gormly in 1884, when he was Mayor of Wagga Wagga. It is from the churchwardens of St. Johns Church, thanking him for the loan of his 'capacious stores' for the Normandy Fair. (Gormly, p.456). James Gormly's columns in the newspapers reveal he was over fifty when he started contributing his thoughts and memoirs and continued until 1921 the year before his death.

Even though he had misfortune he had a long and rewarding life, living until his eighty sixth year. He was successful in his coaching business, his farming practices and his political career and in providing future generations valuable historical information by writing this book. Gormly, himself was also a very important man in the Wagga Wagga community. He was involved in many aspects of Wagga life and was well known for his contribution to the establishment of Wagga Wagga as a significant city in New South Wales.

Exploration and Settlement in Australia

'Exploration and Settlement in Australia' is a collection of newspaper articles, public notices, letters and addresses written by, to or about James Gormly during the latter part of his life. The book was first published in 1921, the year before James Gormly died; Les Gormly republished it in 2004. This is an important book for Wagga Wagga as it contains a wealth of local history about the people and events who lived here from the mid 19th century to early 20th century from the point of view of a man who had experienced many different aspects of society and who had travelled extensively throughout New South Wales and other parts of Australia. Mr Gormly knew the early settlers and explorers and dubious characters, such as Tom Castro, personally, so many of his articles are from first hand accounts from the people involved.

There is a great quantity of important and useful information in the book, however, it has remained inaccessible to a large degree because it is hard to find easily and has not been arranged in any particular order. Chronologically it darts from early dates to later ones at the turn of a page. The newspaper articles, in which Gormly recounts the early exploration of Australia and his own personal experiences, have not been published in any discerning order. Each page reveals new information about an event previously mentioned or, a whole new topic.

Research Methodology

The purpose of this project was to create an index for the book. The events, places, people and themes, which Mr. Gormly referred to from the early days of settlement in Australia, have been gathered and collated into one document, irrespective of their historical, social, political or personal value. This will enable readers and researchers alike to use the book in depth. The brief for the assignment was to create an index for '*Exploration and Settlement in Australia*' by James Gormly without any pre-conceived ideas or notions.

The research method used was 'grounded theory methodology' which involves collecting data with no hypothesis or question in mind, in other words an open mind. This method of collecting data is widely used in education and ethnography. I recorded the data on a spreadsheet and from the books six hundred and eighteen pages, five thousand, eight hundred and eleven entries were gathered. The use of a computer and the Excel software enables the data to be sorted in a number of ways, firstly, by page number, secondly, alphabetically and thirdly by category. This technology instantly brings out emerging themes that are evident and makes the connection of events, people and places throughout the book possible. The next step for this project is to view the themes and key points that have been discovered from the data and regroup them into concepts and categories. These categories are then collapsed again bringing the information back to a manageable size.

I endeavoured to keep an open mind when cataloguing the topics of the book, but found that as I worked through the book, and got to 'know' James, my feelings and predisposition changed. I found I admired the man for standing by his convictions, especially when he was representing the Murrumbidgee Electorate in the New South Wales Legislative Assembly. The last two hundred pages of the book were articles and reports on Gormly's

stand against the Government in Parliament about the Land Bills and water conservation amongst other issues. Although I also got the impression he was pompous and condescending and that he took himself very seriously.

Emerging Themes

Gormly's commentary was based on his own memories from when he was an eight year old boy some sixty or seventy years prior, through his life as a drover, gold digger, coachman, and pastoralist to politician and public servant. The stories about the early explorers would have come from Gormly's own research and reading as well as talking to the members of the exploration parties. It becomes apparent that Gormly was influenced and impressed by men like Charles Sturt, Hamilton Hume and Major Mitchell when he was growing up. Meeting these intrepid explorers left a lasting impression on him, which is obvious in the way he writes about them and the praise he lavishes on them. It also gives an insight into why Gormly became an explorer himself.

There are a number of themes that run through the book, some of which I have particularly found interesting, agriculture and horse racing. Early exploration by Gormly's heroes, Hume, Sturt and Mitchell, is covered extensively. Reading the journals and records from the trips and hearing first hand accounts from the explorers and other men from the parties, gave Gormly the information to write his articles for the newspapers. A lot of the stories about those early expeditions he gathered whilst travelling around the country himself. Gormly knew many of the original pioneers and settlers and was always made welcome for an overnight stay and a restocking of food, water and horses at the Stations on his own exploratory journeys. Many of the old tales were told in front of the fire at night from the older men.

One story that made an impression on me was when Charles Sturt and Hamilton Hume first came across the Darling River in 1829. When they eventually reached the river, the party was surprised and delighted at the width of the water and ran eagerly to drink, as they were hot and thirsty. They were disappointed when they found they couldn't drink the water, as it was too salty. This story has a connection with our relationship with the land today. Drought and climate change are in the news every day and the way we manage our water has become a major concern for the whole of Australia, the fact that the Darling River was salty in the late 1820's shows that salinity is a naturally occurring phenomenon, however, human impact and mismanagement since that time has compounded the problem.

In the latter part of the book there are references to Gormly's stand on water conservation, he spoke several times to the Legislative Assembly about the need to conserve water for agriculture. Some of the water conservation measures he and others of his day planned and brought into fruition, i.e. damming rivers for irrigation and using lakes and rivers for water storage, are currently under debate and change by the current State governments. Water conservation today means saving every drop for the survival of the country, whereas in Gormly's day it was saving and using every drop for agriculture and industry.

Another theme that runs through the book is Gormly's love and respect of horses. He learned to ride at an early age and developed a rapport with these animals that he maintained all his life. During his youth he rode horses as a drover, moving his fathers cattle around the country. Later he owned horses to run his coaching and mail run business. He had a keen interest in horse racing and thoroughbreds, which he pursued all his life and he travelled all over New South Wales and Victoria in a buggy or on horseback.

Horse racing was a major sport and entertainment activity in the 18th and 19th centuries. Every town and city had race meetings, which were well attended by pastoralists and settlers from all over Eastern Australia. Many early settlers and pastoralists bred and trained horses themselves, hence it was inevitable these owners would want to compare them with others. Horse racing in Wagga was introduced in 1849 on St. Patricks Day. John Joseph Roberts organised the meeting and gave a silver cup, worth fifty sovereigns as part of the principle prize. There was no official racecourse until 1854, so some of the races were run in a straight line, a mile long, similar to one Gormly won in 1851.

When he owned his coaching and mail run business he prided himself on the quality and breeding of the horses he owned. Some of them were progeny from a mare he had bred fifty years prior. Another horse he refers to was a colt he bred at Nangus when he was a boy. In the 1852 flood at Gundagai, this animal was washed ten miles down the river and survived. Gormly travelled many miles on this colt; it saved Gormly's life many times when crossing flooded rivers on expeditions into the Western parts of New South Wales as it proved itself to be a strong swimmer. Gormly's admiration for these animals is evident throughout his articles.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this book provides stories, information and documented facts, from Hansard, which will become invaluable to local historians and academics. Not only are the

historical events of Wagga Wagga's settlement embraced, but the history of horse racing, agriculture, gold mining, bush rangers, natural disasters and politics, to mention a few, are dealt with in this publication. The newspaper dates throughout the book establish that James Gormly was in his seventies and eighties when he was writing his column about the early explorers, pioneers and settlers. He refers to Charles Sturt's diaries and journals to recount the expeditions and to verify oral histories and events told by members of the exploration parties. However, there are no references of research or other readings he may have undertaken when writing his articles in the book. It must be remembered that this book is a secondary resource for historical events as a lot of the facts are recounts, memoirs and oral histories

The index, once completed, will enable local historians, professional and amateur, to use '*Exploration and Settlement in Australia*' to its full potential and allow the information within to become more accessible.

References

Gormly, James. Hon. (2004). *Exploration and Settlement in Australia*. Maryborough: McPherson's printing Group.

Morris, S. (1999). *Wagga Wagga: A History*. Wagga Wagga: Bobby Graham Publishers.