

Geelong & District Insolvency Competition

November 2009

Insolvent: James SIMPSON

Submitted by

Geelong Family History Group team

James SIMPSON

As settlers arrived in the parish of Murroon, 20 miles from Colac, mainly as labourers for the large station holders, the beginnings of a settlement soon developed. The main industries that developed were timber getting from the rich sources of the Otway ranges, general farming and dairying. One supposes that most farms attempted to be self sufficient as it was some journey to nearby towns with stores. The only lighting would have been candles and later kerosene lamps.

Glimpses of life are few and far between but a report in January 1864 ¹ of conditions at Murroon and Bambra relate

“our summer sun has during the past few weeks most delightfully cheered the appearance of this remote part of the farm world. Dried up impassable roads, gladdened gardens, ripened fruit and prepared harvest fields for the scythe and sickle and a bountiful harvest is expected.”

Life was certainly hard with various tasks having to be carried out before the settler began working for a living - a house would have to be built, usually of weatherboards and shingled roof. Clearing and fencing were necessary, jobs that could be done hand-in-hand.

Ploughing was usually done with a single furrow plough pulled by a couple of horses or bullocks. Farms were usually mixed with cows, pigs, sheep and fowls all contributing to the income. The main crops were potatoes, turnips, oats and peas. Orchards were usually a necessity and water was carted from a creek.

The first recorded sales that have been found in the *Geelong Advertiser* were advertised on the 22nd January 1853. One allotment of 72 acres sold for 30/- per acre and then allotments varying from 106 acres to 185 acres all sold for 1 pound per acre. In December 1865 further land sales were to take place at Colac. In all there were 36 allotments at Murroon varying from 74 acres to 235 acres but they were ‘withdrawn from sale and would form a portion of agricultural area which would be opened up for selection on the 20th of this month. The land “was situated on the Barwon River, 16 miles south-west of Colac and we hope that readers in that district will receive this intimation in time enough to prevent a long and useless journey”.²

In 1870 James Simpson was a bullock driver at Murroon on 20 acres with a hut and brush fence.³ In Land Selection Files 29 Dec 1873 John had applied for ownership of this land, Allotment 82A.⁴

By June 1878 James was a labourer and filed for Insolvency - due to illness of both himself, his wife and daughter, and the inability through illness to earn money. No reference can be found to his marriage or to the birth of this child. James owed £58/7/6.⁵ A Formal meeting was held on 12 June with ‘no debts proven and meeting closed’. A year later James applied for a certificate of discharge from his debts. This was granted, conditional on his giving up the lease of a selection of 20 acres of land.

In a letter to the Local Land Board, Geelong on 29 April 1880, James stated he was not in a position to pay the rent but requested that the lease not be forfeited. Simpson has assigned the lease to the Official Assignee for the benefit of his creditors, by the direction of the judge, it being a condition that his Certificate should issue upon his surrendering this lease, it being the only available asset. The Official

¹ Geelong Advertiser 1864

² Geelong Advertiser 5.12.1865

³ Winchelsea Shire Rate Book 1870

⁴ PROV Land Selection Files : No: 47813/19.20

⁵ PROV Insolvency Files VPRS 851/107/2928, Colac Herald 9 June 1878

Assignee asks a month to be allowed to sell the holding and close the estate. Recommends that the request of the Official Assignee be acceded to. NOTE: Rent has now been paid up to 25 Sep 1880. (dated 11 Jun 1880)

On 21 Jul 1880 an Official Assignee letter to the Secretary of Lands stated “I have the honour to inform you that I relinquish all claim in and to respect of the lease of James Simpsonand beg to request that a Crown Grant may be issued to him on his application for the same and his payment of all the balance of the purchase money”.

James’ land as per the 1883-1884 Rate Book was noted as ‘Land & dwelling valued at £5’.

On 14 September 1883 Henry Smith was arrested for cattle stealing. James SIMPSON, a well-known character at Murroon is still at large!⁶ It appears that Smith & James had stolen 3 cows from a selector named Henry Chappell at Murroon on the 21st August 1883, and these same animals were then sold, then the cattle were removed from Mr Campbell’s paddock and driven back to Murroon. It also appeared that the young man named Smith, lived together with the old man named Simpson.⁷ At a trial a verdict of not guilty was handed down.

By 1885-1886 Frederick William Thurrowgood, carrier, occupied James’ land & dwelling on 23 acres, the owner being The Crown, valued at £1/10/-.

James is no longer listed in the Rate Books for Murroon and appears to have died in Colac in 1903.⁸

[Compiled by GFHG Team]

⁶ Geelong Advertiser 14/9, 9/10, 30/10, 2/11, 6/11/1883

⁷ The Argus Friday 14 September 1883

⁸ Colac Cemetery Records - GHC