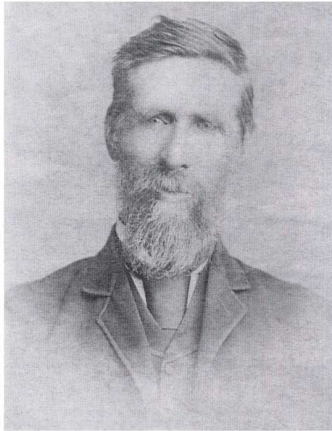


Excerpts From

**THE
ADVENTURES OF
A FREE SETTLER
IN AUSTRALIA
1848 - 1896**



**A Rollicking Tale
JAMES DANNOCK
Edited by Joan Small**

Ebook Version

Published 2005

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PREFACE

James Thomas Dannock's account of his life as a free settler in Australia is not only an exciting tale, but an important first hand account of many momentous historic events in four colonies of Australia: NSW, Victoria, Queensland and Western Australia.

James' family went to Ipswich in Queensland when it was still called Limestone whilst he and his brother worked around Sydney: they all travelled from Sydney to Melbourne just after the Colony of Victoria was separated from New South Wales: James was one of the early gold diggers in Victoria even before the official rush for gold began: he was in the midst of one of Australia's worst bushfires, Black Thursday 1851, and he travelled to Western Australia at the time of that state's biggest gold discoveries in the 1890's.

There have been several accounts of the story.

Handwritten by James in 1896, it was typed with his original spelling and lack of punctuation by his daughter May. Copies of May's version have been passed around amongst the descendents. It is fascinating to read, as the phonetic spelling gives a hint of James' Norfolk accent.¹

James' son Jesse edited the story, using modern spelling and punctuation.

Later last century one of James' grand-daughters retold the story in a publication of her own, but it was felt by many family members that James' style of story telling was lost in this translation.

¹ See the excerpt from the original at the end of the book.

In presenting the story here, I have kept to James' original words and expressions as transcribed by May, and have at times used his original mis-spellings. I have researched to find the correct spelling and location of towns James mentions, from his description and from Australian goldrush history.

I make no apologies for any inaccuracies. It is simply a personal account of James' life in Australia.

I have called great grandfather Dannock's story a 'rollicking tale' because of his humourous, descriptive and well-paced style. He was a typical 'Australian Larrikin'.

Joan Small, Editor

Great Grand-daughter of James Dannock

PAGE 16 of the Original (Previous pages deal with Jame's upbringing in Norfolk England)

Voyage to Australia 28th May to October 1848

About this time, father being out of work, he make up his mind to go to America and take me and leave the rest of the family home until he could send for them.

At this time there was free emigration to the colonies.² So he got a passage for himself and mother and four of the family leaving the two oldest at home.³

This was in 1848 that we left home for Sydney in the good ship Castle Eden, Captain Austin, with first, second and third mates and about 40 sailors, I think about 600 emigrants. Ship 2000 tons register. Sailed from Deptford about the 28th May 1848. Called at Gravesend, took on sheep, pigs and so on, called at Plymouth and took in passengers and doctor and then away we go.⁴



² Transportation of convicts to Australia ceased in 1846. In August 1847, Earl Grey undertook to send 5000 immigrants to Australia to relieve the chronic shortage of labour in the colonies. Caroline Chisolm, whose portrait was on the Australian \$5 note for more than 20 years, advocated assisted immigration, and formed the 'British Colonization Loan Society' to send out a better class of future colonists, rather than former convicts.

The Dannocks were fortunate to emigrate before the rush to the gold diggings after 1851.

³ James snr, wife Honor, James jnr, Bill, Dan, and Susanna.

⁴ **Castle Eden** (930), 15.6.1848 Plymouth, 9.10.1848, 116 days, S/S Thomas Mackern, 299 (252½) emb, 4 died, 6 born; Master-John Austin

Now there happens to be a sailor aboard from Yarmouth, which you know is in Norfolk, and I being a 'Norfolk dumpling' we soon were friends. 'Now', he said, 'You land lubber, I will put you up to a trick or two. Now', he say, 'You get a good size canvas bag and when they are all sick they will throw away their tucker in all directions. You fill your bag with anything that will keep. You can sell them'.

So I bagged a fine lot of current cakes, fancy biscuits, ships biscuits, and I bought a hammock and turned my bunk into a store-room and sleep in the hammock. All went well till we reach the line. There we got becalmed many times – sometimes for days.

One Sunday morning we were laying nice and quiet, the plums and other puddings were boiling away for dinner. All seems going on all right. It was a grand clear morning and about eleven o'clock I was on deck and with a good man looking over the starboard side.

There was an old sailor standing close by. He pointed out a dark shade on the water some distance off. It looked as if the sun was behind a cloud but there was no cloud. We watched it coming nearer the ship. The water began to ripple, the wind began to whistle in the rigging for we had all the sails set.

Oh my! What a spriter we are caught in. A terrible white squall. Crack! go all the masts one after the other. Out of the coppers came the duffs and rolling about the decks. The masts and sails overboard hanging by the ropes. Some of the women rolling about the decks with children, and

hot pots and all manner of things. The cargo shifting below deck.

We were laying over a good deal till the rigging was cut away. Strange to say no-one was hurt much. Good to see the masts went or I suspect we would have gone to Davy Jones Locker.

When it was over we looked fine, with three stumps of masts sticking up. We get on our way as fast as we could, which was slow traveling. We had some spares on board so they rigged a jury mast and put on more sail, so we got to Sydney in the space of one hundred and eighteen days, living on salt junk all the time.

Now as we got near the Cape of Good Hope it got very cold, which could sharpen the appetite. So I opened my store and, as the old sailor had told me, they were glad to buy back what they threw away at the start. We had a plan on board. What we could not sell we would raffle.

We had jolly times on board. A weekly newspaper written by one of the cabin passengers and handed round. One would sit on the table and read aloud to the rest.

We had our court day. Our judge and jury, witness duly sworn in and all sorts of punishments for misdeeds. The court day the reporter would be present. Sometimes we would have lawyers and then there would be fine fun. The sailors used to come down.

Arrival at Sydney. To Rock Point Georges River

Well, here we are at Sydney at last. A fine harbour it is. Now for the fresh tucker, my what a treat.

We had no sickness on board so they soon begin to clear out. I was loath to leave the old ship, but my turn soon came. Myself and a younger brother were hired on board the ship for twelve months for twenty pounds the two, with rations, to go to a place called Rock Point to Georges River, twelve miles from Sydney. Father, Mother and the rest of the family went to Moreton Bay for twelve months.

Me and brother Bill left the ship at midday on October 14, 1848, and was drove out to our new home the same afternoon. I milked three cows the same evening. The place belonged to Mrs Cooper. The husband had died at Lake George where he had a station, a little while before we went. The work was mostly strapping and milking the cows. Bill's work was more about the house. We used to board in the big house and sleep over the kitchen.

All went well for about four months. Then came a change over the scene. One morning Bill got drunk. He had to go through the dining room to the pantry for the knife box. On the table stood a decanter half full of brandy so he took a good pull at it as there was no-one about. He stayed in the pantry a bit and the grog began to take effect. All at once he caught sight of more grog and of course he wanted another nobbler.

By this time now he began to think about a smoke so he began on the old gent's shag tobacco. He was making up

small parcels of it when Miss Tomlinson, the housekeeper, came upon the scene. So she said to Bill, 'Are you drunk?'

'No', said Bill. 'I am no more drunk than you are'.

At that time he was making his way out holding onto the wall. The old gentleman who the tobacco was for was a Mr Chapman that took the place of master in the house. What reason is not known.

The result of this spree was we had to leave the big house and take up quarters in a hut on rations which was ten of flour, ten of meat, two of sugar, quarter of a pound of tea and had to do our own cooking. A fine muddle I made of the first damper. I put it in the fire all right but thought the ashes were too hot so went out to get a shovel full of wet ashes and put on the top. I patted them down with the shovel. When we took it out it looked like a wedding cake on top but it did not taste like one. It was a sod.

Now when I had been there about six months Mr Chapman hired a runaway sailor to work with me at the stumping. A fine card he was. He came from Hammersmith near London. I was glad when my twelve months was up so that I might cut from his company or he might have got me into trouble. I have not seen him since. He was a clever rough; he could put his hand in your pocket and you would not know it.

The old boss would be watching us at work and Harry, that was what we used to call him, would watch his chance and have his silk handkerchief or snuff box. Then, when the old man missed it he would look him straight in the eye and say, 'Sir, I see you have them just this minute'.

We have hidden them, so we got a spell looking for them, but of course we never found them.

When he first came there was a great lot of pigeons. They used to come round the hut and he would catch them with a soft pea on a fish hook, then put them into wet clay and into the hot ashes just as they were, so that never was there any trace of them about the hut.

One day I thought he had killed the poor old man. We were stumping and the boss was watching us. We had all the roots cut that we could see. Then we got a long lever. 'Now', say the boss, 'Me and James will pull on the lever, and when we shake the stump you, Harry, see where it is holding'.

'All right', say he and give me a wink, so I keep clear of the lever. Then he said, 'Shake away'.

I see where the root is and stroke the lever from me under the root. Down it came on top of the old man's head. I thought he was killed and the sailor rolling about in the stump hole groaning and holding his leg, which was not hurt.

After a while the master came round, sitting up and looking round, and seeing Harry laying in the hole, he asked him if he was hurt much.

'Oh, my leg', says he.

'You had better go home and James will help me home.'

I got him home and he went straight to bed and kept there for a week. Next day the sailor's leg had a great lot of bandage on, so it could not be seen. He got a week's spell

and was not hurt at all, and got all sorts of treats sent from the master's table for half killing him. I got it a bit easier while the boss was laid up.

Now come another hitch. Brother Bill get drunk again.

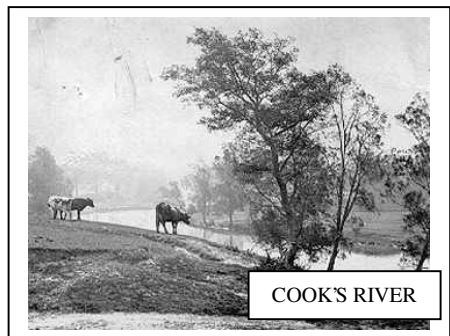
He used to go to Sydney every Saturday with the horse and cart to fetch supplies. It was 24 miles there and back so it took a good long day. This time, nine o'clock at night, no Bill. No sound of a dray along the road. So George the overseer was started on horseback to look for him. He went halfway to Sydney, that is to Cook's River. At that place was a pub called Garner's Public House. George made enquiries here about Bill.

'Oh yes. He called here three hours ago and got a bottle of gin and went on.

So George turned back, and after crossing the dam at Cook's River he tracked the dray, which had left the track and turned into the bush for about 200 yards, and then got stuck. My noble Bill, fast asleep. This was about 11 o'clock Saturday night.

The poor old master did not know what to do with him. He said he would send him to jail, but he let him off with paying for the things he had lost.

Now our twelve months is drawing to a close and what with a draw or two we had made, and what he



had deducted for losses we had not much to take.

It was almost like the old 'one pound you had and did not have, and the one you were going to have makes us square'.

A letter from Father March 21, 1849 to Moreton Bay

I have now before me a letter written before my writing March 21st 1849 written by my father at Moreton Bay, to me and my brother at Rock Point Georges River. I give a copy of the original (I am writing this August 14, 1896)

My Dear Boys,

You must forgive me in not writing to you before. Things have been in such unsettled states. We have not had a house nor home to ourselves till now and I take this as the first opportunity, hoping these lines will meet you both, my dear boys, in good health and comfortable in your place.

Your mother and me are more settled than we were, thank God for that. We have had many troubles since we last saw you. Your mother is just come up to me from Kangaroo Point, the first place in Moreton Bay, but Mr Smith have moved his boiling down establishment to a place called Mari, near Limestone, now called Ipswich, 25 miles higher up the river from the old place.⁵

⁵ Ipswich is located 40 kms west of Brisbane and is sited on the Bremer River. It is the oldest provincial city in Queensland. It was not until February 10, 1842 that the District of Moreton Bay was proclaimed open for free settlers. Soon after that date, the Governor of New South Wales, Sir George Gipps, came to the Moreton Bay District, to make inspections before planning the two towns of Brisbane and Limestone. Governor Gipps decided to adopt the name of the town of Ipswich on the River Orwell in Suffolk, England.

When first I came on the ground a fortnight before Christmas, there was not a house nor a place to sleep, but under a few sheets of bark. Seven of us slept in a humpy.

Our first treat when we arrived at Moreton Bay, which was three weeks from leaving Sydney, we all had to live in one house, Healy and family, myself and family. Next, your mother, brother and sister were near blind with the mosquitoes, and since your mother has been here she and your sister have had the sandy blight and I begin to think your mother would lose her sight altogether. But, bless God, he hath restored her sight that she might behold your faces again, which I hope will be when our times are up.

We have all sorts of torments here. Snakes of different sorts, death adders and scorpions, centipedes, and fleas by the thousand and tens of thousands. We cannot sleep or rest night or day. Your sister is suffering at this time with a large sore set under the arm.

Your brother, Dan, is with some butchers at Limestone, keeping sheep. He has been there since Christmas, so that we have only poor Susanna now, but I hope a few months more, please God, will bring us all together again.

Your mother longs to see you dear boys.

We have plenty of blacks visit us. Some of them are rather troublesome.

Poor brother Dan would like to see you. He is always talking about his brothers, Jimmy and Bill, when we go and see him, which is once in three weeks. We expect him over to see us on Sunday next, with his young masters to pay us a visit down the river in their boat. It is about 7 miles by water. It will be quite a treat to him.

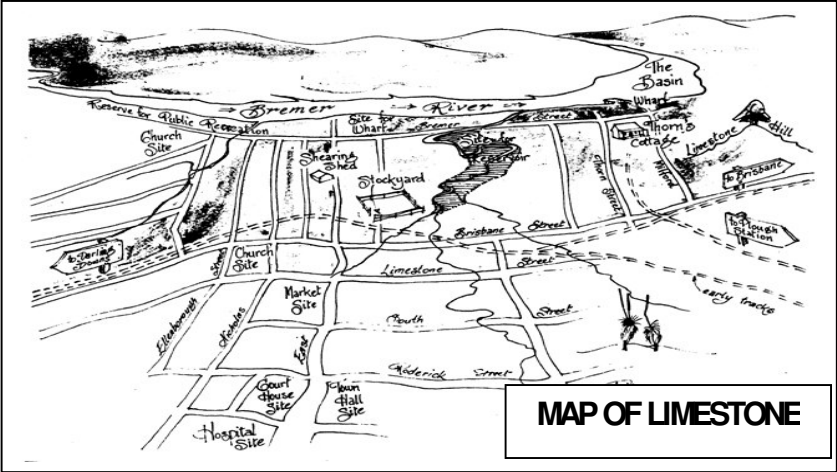
Now, my dear boys, I hope you will behave yourselves like men and strive to maintain good characters. Your mother is counting the time away that we may, by God's help, come down and see you, as there is no getting employment for young chaps here. But if God permit, I will write again to you before my time is up to let you know how matters stand. I hope you will write. I hope you will send me and your mother a few lines as we shall be so glad to hear from you if ever so little. Pray do not fail to grant this small request. I hope you will let me know in your letter what is become of Frank Webster. I shall endeavour to come down to Sydney as soon as my time is out, the sweet 16th October next.

I am getting 'cobben' tired, so no more from your affectionate father at present.

Your mother's wish is that you show Frank Webster this letter.

Frank Webster is a young man who came out with us from the same place. He had a brother in Melbourne

but did not know where to find him. Frank went to California and joined the Mormons.



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Off to the Diggings, June/July 1851

My next job was with the brick makers at Prahran⁶, and from there to Anderson Creek⁷ diggings. There were eight in the party, five married and three single men. I do not know if one of them is living beside myself at this time.

It started this way. The brick makers used to go to Melbourne on Saturday nights and they always called to get their beer at the Rainbow Hotel, Swanson St, Melbourne, kept by Mr Marchell. He was a friend of one of the men and on this Saturday night he showed them some gold and told them where he got it. He had been at the creek for about a fortnight. He had been to California and I believe he was the first to work payable gold in Victoria.

Well, we made up a party next week. The names of the married men were Mr George Hardy, Mr Oldfield, Mr Wesnet, Mr Jordan⁸. He had at that time a punt at Punt Rd Richmond. And Mr Hudsfeld, he was my boss. That was the married men of the party. The single men, Mr William Hayes, afterwards a leading man in Dunolly, Mr Robert Hillman, afterwards in the railway department, myself James Dannock.

Mr Hardy had a horse and dray so we took a load of rations. We loaded up on the Saturday and waited till the clock struck twelve on Sunday night, then we go.

⁶ Sometimes spelt Prahan

⁷ July 1851 gold discovered at Anderson Creek - near Warrandyte.

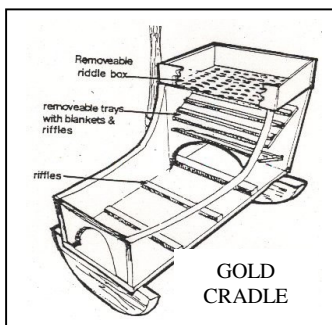
⁸ Proprietor of the Punt Hotel, Punt Rd, Richmond

Not one of us had seen any diggings before. We got up on the Tuesday morning. There was six or eight at work on the creek. This was the last week in June, or the first week in July, I am not sure which in 1851.

We set to work at once in the creek, working into Golden Point⁹. We put up a bark hut, made ourselves comfortable.

At the end of the first week the five married men all got homesick and sold us three single men their share of the rations. Now here we are with three month's rations, a good bark hut, tub and cradle and other tools.

Now let me tell you about this cradle.¹⁰ It ought to have been put in a museum. It was made by Mr Jordan that had the punt at Richmond, out of some old punt boards an inch and a half thick and tarred both sides. It was six feet long and two feet



wide, took both hands to rock it, and when the sun was warm the tar would melt and the gold stick to it. When we left we buried it. We ought to have burned it and washed the ashes. I believe we would have got an ounce of gold out of it.

⁹ Golden Point in the Bendigo diggings before the rush began. When the goldrush occurred in December 1851, within 5 weeks 2000 tents and 10,000 men were encamped there. 20,000,000 ozs of gold were later found there.

¹⁰ James Esmond introduced the cradle to the Creswick diggings. He adapted it from techniques he had seen in California. See Appendix for Alexander Tolmer's account of the operation of the cradle.

We were doing all right until the Commissioner and a trooper came along and wanted the licence.¹¹

He was on horseback and came right on us before we knew it. So he caught us on the hop.

He said, 'Are you getting gold, my men?'

We handed him a pannikin. It had about two ounces in it.

'Oh', he said. 'I did not think you were getting gold like that. You must pay the licence.'

One of my mates said that we will go to Ballarat where they are getting it by the bucket full. This was in October 1851.¹²

Continued.....

¹¹ Licences: On 18 August 1851 it was made illegal to search for gold without a licence and on 1 September a fee was set at 30 shillings a month.

¹² The Ballarat goldrush began in August 1851.

Editor's note: It appears that James and his party were subject to one of the first demands for a licence. If they had not been chased away from Golden Point, Bendigo by this demand they may have made a huge fortune, being there before the Bendigo rush began.

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