

The following letters were copied from the collection of the Cohuna Historical Society. They were written by William Hird and his son Thomas Hird who settled in Northern Victoria in the late 1870s.

**Barkers Creek
Christmas Day 1877**

Dear Brother Sister and Niece

We received your letter by last mail, and was glad to hear you where all well, as we are at present. I was sorry to hear that trade was so bad, and you being rambeling about so much. I told Mary Jane the last time she wrote to tell you that I could give no better advice than before, that was not to stay in England to lose your money. Did not know untill after, she had not done so, as she was not at home at the time.

According to what I can learn this country is better than America, as there is a good many leaving their for Australia. It would cost more money, and take a little longer time to get hear than America take about 7 weeks by steam, cost about £45.

Our land laws are the same as when I last wrote any persons not being married woman, at the age of 18 years can select for themselves any quantity of land not exceeding 320 acres, by applying for it, at the price of 1 pound per acre besides cost of survey which will be 8 or 10 pound according to where it is. Conditions under which it is granted, first to reside on it within 6 months from time of granting, 2nd to cultivate 1 acre in 10, fence in and to improve, at the rate of 1 pound per acre within 3 years. These compulcery clauses will make the improvements at £1 per acre the purchase money is paid as rent, half yearly in advance at the rate of 2/- per acre per year for 10 years which makes £1 per acre or the balance can be paid of any time after 3 years, and not before. At that time a 320 acre block is worth from 1000, to 1200 pound the ground is some of it plain and some timbered, I prefer a little of boath where it can be got, I road about 50 miles across a plain, a month ago I rode 67 miles the same day on a draft Horse.

Thos. Got his land 320 acres last March the other 2 boys have been with him they got about 8 or 10 acres of crop in, some of it was pretty good and some only Poor it was to late. It ought to have been in at the beginning of April, instead of that it was June. He came here in June and took back with him 30 head of cattle old and young, he took 22 to market on 14th December about 12 miles some of them calves at them, some just at calveing some 2 year olds, some 1 year, and 2 or 3 cows good beef, all in fine condition but did not sell one of them, owin to dryness of the weather. It is a better time for buying than selling at presant so they will have to be kept a wile longer, as he has got plenty of grass, a good general rain would make them worth near double the money. Their was 3 or 400 in market and only about 30 sold, or rather gave away. I went up their in September and stayed 2 months with them I was surprised to see the improvement in the Cattle. It is a fine country for grazeing or cultivateing., all being well he will have about 30 acres of crop in next season. They had only about a fortnight work of fenceing to do when I left their. In about six months, he will have his 3 years of improvements complied with, so that you will see they are getting verry will. They work together ver agreeable, and on the understanding to help one another which is the best thing they can do, unity is strength. I expect to see them all have their 320 acres of land each, before this time 5 years.

I applied for 300 for my self before I came away, ajoining Tom's allotment. Tom has only about 50 acres of plain ground the remainder lightly timbered. What I applied for is about

half plain and half timber, it will be 3 or 4 months before I get it, it will take the 4 of us about 2 months to fence it in with a pair of horses to help us.

Cheese making pays very well up their. I was at the place were Tom lived before he selected, about 2 miles from him they where making 15 pound worth of cheese per week from 30 cows 12 of them had been calved near twelve months. They told me they considered the ground a gift. Tom is very hiley respected by them, he was with them 2 years and 4 months. They was complaining of the want of a butcher, the same as I have heard of other places but I have not the means to take up land and Butcher to. It would be a scattered trade in these new places, the meat would have to be carted out, it would not be like a town, but I believe it to be a first rate paying business.

I shall not say come but do as you think best, at the same time if you had come 5 years ago, I believe you would have been far better of, you would have had money to start with and money makes money, there is plenty of room here for that purpose. I think if my family had been here years earlier it would have been far better for like a many more I should have been oblided to look for something else instead of the lumps of gold which I never got. I wanted to make a fortune quick, which a great many have done, gold digging owes me about £1000 which I never expect to receive from it. When I first came here I could have had £2.2.0 per week and board and lodging as a Juroreman, that would have been far better, my experience is dear bought.

I do not know what I shall do with the place we have got. Shall have to sell it of get money on it as it will take a good bit to stock and carry on 620 acres of land. Horses are very dear at present, we expect Tom home next week. I don't think he would come back to England to stop if any Boddy would give him £500. Jonathan came home on Thursday last, John will have to stay with himself until they go back. M.J. lives at Castlemaine she get 8/- per week but intends to raise shortly. Annie is at home just left school.

You say you are getting old people, my wife laughs at the idea, she says she considers her self a young woman yet and you are 10 years younger, than her, and if you come she will welcome you to her home untill you can find a better place. She says don't leave your feather beds, cutlery are very dear, don't sell what you can conveniently pack, that is supposeing you do come. I will send you a newspaper and one to Father along with this. Tell Father I am very sorry that I am not able to assist him in his declineing years, it is my own fault, not by any misconduct but by sticking to the digins to long. It is a fine country I believe about the best in the world for a working industreous man.

I must conclude with well wishes, in hopes you will deside for the best, whatever direction that my lead to.

Remember me to Father Brothers and Sisters and all inquireing Friends,
I remain your
Affectionate Brother
Wm. H. Hird

To H. Hird

Address as before we shall not leave hear altogather for a good while yet.
Toms address Gunnawarra, Vie Echuca, Victoria Australia

PS

Mother Jonathan and I were at the Christmas sports yesterday. We enjoyed ourselves verry well. We will have a good few of grapes this season, they will be ripe about March, you had better come and help us to eat them. Mother sends her best love to you all accept the same from me and Annie Hird.

Gunbower Creek
Dec 24th 1877

Dear Uncle, Aunt and Cousin

I received a letter from Barker's Creek last Sunday, and in it one from you and was glad to hear that you were all well ...

I see by your letter that Father told you that I had been selecting I will have been on the ground a year in March. Father was here about 6 weeks and both Brothers most of the time. Father has pegged out a 300 acre block alongside me, I have nearly got fenced in. Had 10 acres of Crop in this year but it did not come to much owing to the dry season and it being put in very late I shall try to get in between 30 or 40 acres in next year. I suppose we will all be up here in 3 or 4 months if Father gets the ground. It is very good part of the country all level ground plain and timbered about 4 miles from the Murry, and about one mile and a half from the Gunbower a very good creek with plenty of Fish and Duck in. We are about 50 miles from the railway but I think we will have one up here in a short time at any way we can go to it by water. The ground is nearly all taken up about here there is plenty further back yet. I suppose Father told you all about taking up ground so I have no need I might just say you can take up 320 acres put in 4 pegs apply for it pay about 9 pounds for survey and you will get up a license to occupy in about 4 or 5 months, and then you have to pay £32 for 10 years (or you can buy it out at the end of 3 years) and then it is yours the ground is well worth £3 per acre as it stands and would fetch that of put up for sale. It is the best thing going out here. A man with £100 is able to get along with a block but it is rather rough for the first year or two but plenty commences with less and single handed too. It is about 100 miles from fathers place. He went from here home on a heavy horse bender going 10 miles round in 2 days. A hundred miles or two is to be thought very little off. I am going home in 2 or three days with the dray to be home at New Year. It is a good deal like home as far as the people but more independent. The wages are about £1 per week for a young fellow on a farm, and so a man can soon save enough to give him a start if he is careful as he has very little expenses. We have it pretty warm weather now. We have 4 months in the year pretty warm in that time we have it cool about 5 days in every fortnight now yesterday was pretty hot and you want a good fire to keep you warm today, but 8 months in the year you could not wish for better no cold wintry weather like home. I like this place a lot better than Barkers Creek. Plenty of kangaroos here and cockatoos to many rather. A selector here has very little expenses save food, clothing and rent if he gets a timbered block. He can make a log house, and he has plenty of firewood and plenty of wood for log fencing I have done about 2 miles and as another selector farms me one side and Father on the other, then ground on the 3rd and a road on the 4th I have only about 10 chains to do. It costs about £40 per mile for log fencing and about £50 for wire to let if by contract it is about 3 miles around a block. I have not got a very large house yet about 11 by 13 ft made of logs and plastered and covered with reeds. As I am not thinking about getting an Old Woman yet it will do very well for a bachelor.

Rabbits, Hares, Sparrows and those kind of English animals do very well out here. You can see droves of sparrows about the towns and the gardeners are wanting to know how to destroy them. There is plenty of Rabbits getting about here I don't expect there was any 3 or 4 years ago I have caught half a dozen about here. I see you wanted a long letter ...

I was living over two years with one Farmer before I selected for 15s per week. I got that from the first and I never asked for more. I would not go for less than a pound now. It was a very good place to live at. He milked about 35 cows in the best of the season and made Cheese about 75 lbs per day in the best of the grass. Never hand feed Cows here except in the Towns. Get about 6d to 7d per lb at the door. He has got a selector about a mile from me and so it was with being with him made me get here.

The harvesting is all done about here now it is ready about the middle of November and so we get it over nicely before Christmas. As soon as it is pretty well down they are all wanting to get thrashed but here is not much just round here this year as I don't think one selector as been here three years yet, but I think there will be a good bit in next year. This has been two very dry seasons, the swamps and some of the creeks have had no water in them as the Murray did not overflow. In a wet season the Murray water runs past the door down a creek.

I remain you loving nephew
Thomas Hird

You ought to get this letter in Febury.
Mr and Mrs V Pattie Hird.