

HISTORY OF FORREST



In the early 19th Century, wealthy pastoralists – mainly from Tasmania - were looking for more land to graze their livestock. These *squatters* started to move into the Western District of Victoria, following the Barwon River through **Winchelsea** towards **Birregurra**. They took up some huge land holdings including:

- Yan Yan Gurt, 16,000 acres (6,500 hectares)
- Gerangamete, 21,000 acres (8,500 hectares)
- River Station, 7,100 acres (3,000 hectares)
- Stony Rises, 26,000 acres (10,000 hectares)
- Deans Marsh, 7,680 acres (3,100 hectares)
- Cherry Tree Hill, 3,840 acres (1,500 hectares)

The **Armitage** and **Roadknight** families were among these early squatters.

In the 1860s, Colonial Governments began to grapple with problem of land ownership and decided that many of the squatters' holdings would not be recognized. The first **Land Acts** were passed by the Victorian Parliament, offering settlers allotments within defined agricultural areas and to purchase land at a uniform price of £1 per acre.

The government also set maximum lot sizes and required occupants to develop their land. These new settlers were known as *selectors*, as they were able to select land to purchase.

The first selectors in our area took up the fertile river flats along the West Barwon River. The families involved were **Grant, Reid, Porteus, Hennigan** and **Bartlett**, with the **Asplin** family selecting further inland on Roadknight Creek.



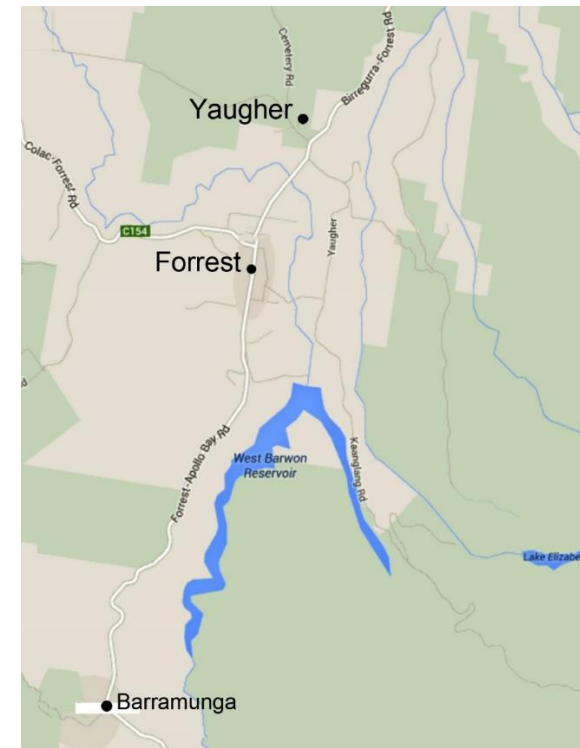


These were mixed farms which not only produced cream and ran piggeries, but grew wheat, oats, potatoes, peas and onions and more particularly established the first hop fields in the area. Some tobacco and hemp was also grown.

With the need for community facilities, a small township called **Yaugher** grew up, about two kilometres north of the site of the future Forrest township. It contained a school, an Anglican Church and a store.

The huge stands of mountain ash forest in the Otways attracted sawmillers. Mills were established from the 1860s, shipping timber from the coast or to the rail yards at Colac and Birregurra, involving a long haul on roads impassable in winter.

Once again to meet the community needs of workers in this area, a township sprang up called **Barramunga** about six kilometres south of the future site of Forrest. There was a Hotel, boarding house, store, school, church and community hall.





This was the age of railway expansion in Victoria and pressure was growing for a rail link from Birregurra to the foothills of the Otways, to cater for the growing needs of farmers to get produce to market and for the cartage of timber to the city. The local member for Polwarth in the State Legislative Assembly, Charles L. Forrest, took up the cause. By 1884, the government decided to create a rail link from **Birregurra**, connecting a number of townships terminating at **Barramunga**. The line was to go south following the Barwon River, but the people of Lorne felt this route was too far away for a connection to the coast and it was decided to run the line through **Deans Marsh**.

The railway was surveyed to Barramunga going south along the valley of the Barwon River but residents of Lorne complained that it was too far away to allow a connection so an alternative route was planned via Deans Marsh. This greatly increased the cost and along with the more difficult terrain towards Barramunga it was decided to terminate the line on a flat area of Bartlett's property about two kilometres beyond the township of Yaughter. This led to anger and a protest meeting of residents of Barramunga. (The wonderful photo of this gathering in front of the Barramunga Hotel gives us a good insight into men's attire in the 1890s.)

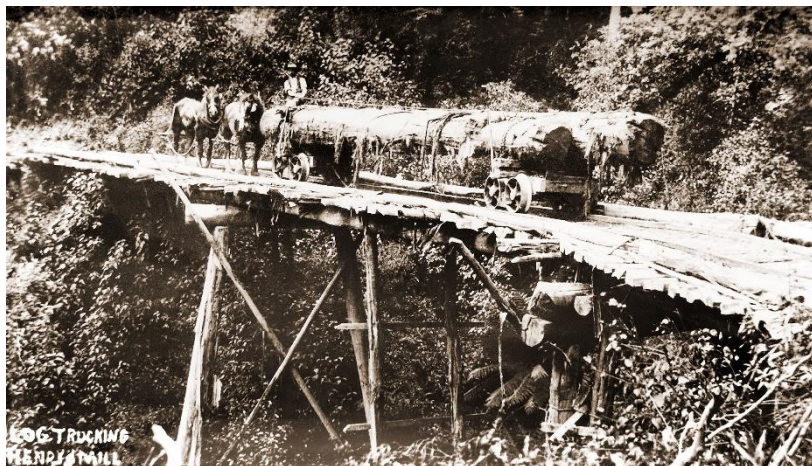
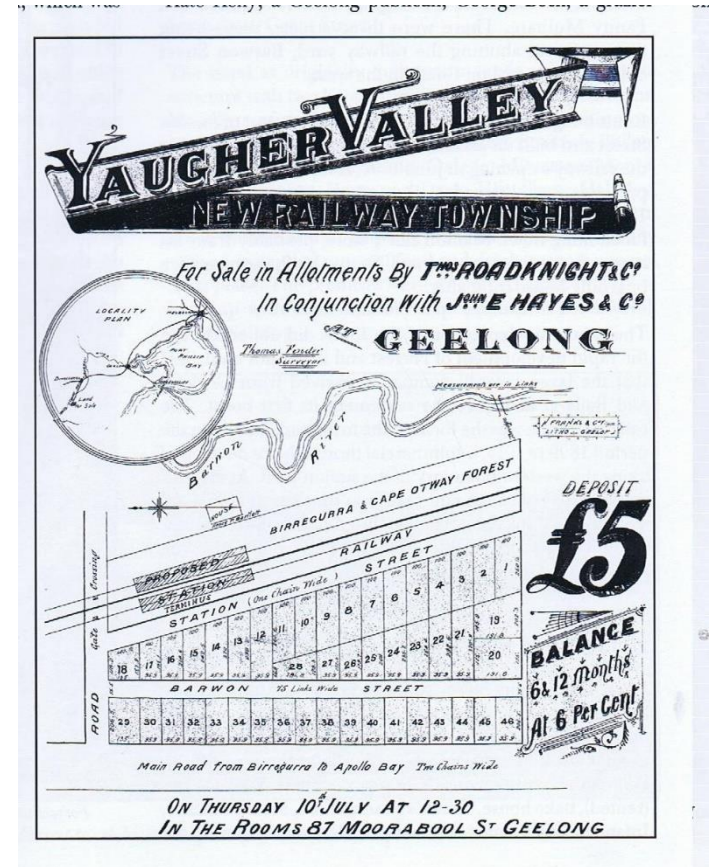




Charles Forrest

At first the terminus of the rail line was to be called *Yaucher* but eventually it was named *Forrest* after the local politician who had fought so hard for the rail link.

A subdivision plan was drawn up of the township with sites being offered for sale in 1890.



The new rail terminal opened up greater opportunities for the establishment of timber mills in the bush and many sprung up connected to the railhead by a network of tram lines involving extensive earthworks, remarkable trestle bridges and even a tunnel through the hillside built by miners brought from the Ballarat minefields.

Businesses sprang up in Station Street, including the Terminus Hotel. It was decided to move the school from Yaucher to the growing Forrest township. The Anglican Church had recently been burnt down and a fresh church was built at Forrest along with other community facilities such as a Hall.

Forrest had become a thriving township with a school population of over 100 students. There was a bakery and a butcher's shop served by a nearby abattoir. There were also Government offices associated with the growing timber industry. There were several train services a week carting away timber and farm produce and bringing back supplies for the community.



FORREST SPORTS—LOG CHOPPING.

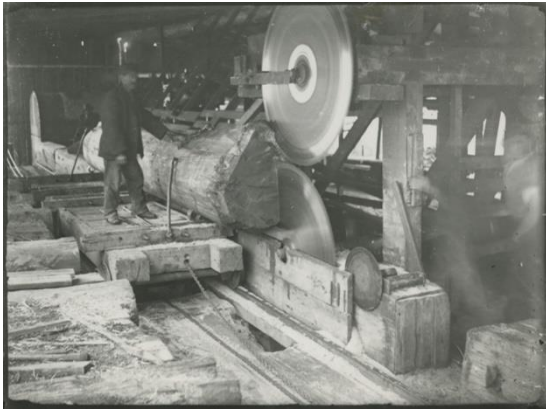
An important event in those early years was the annual Forrest Sports Day. Special trains brought visitors from neighbouring areas and over 1,000 people enjoyed a variety of athletic sports.



ANNUAL SPORTS AT FORREST—WATCHING THE HIGHLAND DANCING.

Extensive hop fields continued to thrive, offering seasonal employment for many women and children in the town at hop picking time; they also helped with crops of potatoes and peas.

Milk was mainly separated at the farm or at local creameries before being sent off to butter factories.

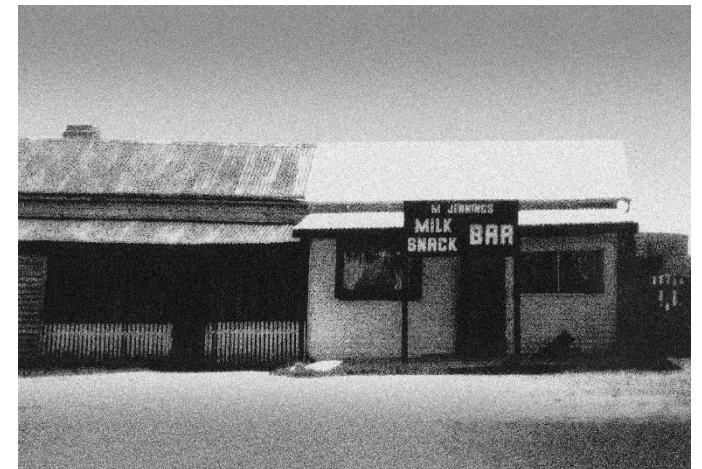


The severe bushfires in 1939 led the Government to take the view that it was unsafe to continue the settlements in the bush.

It was also decided that the bush mills should close and mills established in townships. The mills established in Forrest became major sources of employment and changed the character of the township to some degree.

The arrival of motor vehicles in the 1930s made it easier for people to shop in the nearby city of Colac. With the arrival of electricity in the late 1950s - and the availability of modern refrigerators - local businesses like the butcher, bakery and general store slowly declined. With fewer train services, Station Street became less important and the focus of the community tended to move to the main road.

The community hall burnt down in 1963 and a new one constructed on the main road adjacent to the Anglican Church and the school.





s standing at Forrest station. It had replaced the old 'flying dunny' in 1937 and ran daily-

By the 1930s, rail travel had diminished to the point where it was uneconomical to run frequent steam trains, so a modified *Dodge* car accommodating about 16 passengers ran on the train lines several times a week to Birregurra. It's black and yellow stripes led to it being called "The Tiger" and it is still well remembered by local residents.



In the early 1960s the authority responsible for Geelong's water supply decided to build a dam on the West Barwon River just above the Forrest township. For a period this resulted in an influx of construction workers and additional employment for locals.



By the end of the 20th century - with diminishing timber reserves and pressure to conserve the remaining native forest in the Otways - saw milling declined. By 2005 - with the end of the timber industry - authorities were looking for ways to develop the future economy of Forrest. Funds were devoted to promoting tourist facilities including the creation of 30 km of mountain bike tracks - annual Mountain Bike competitions bring up to 3,000 visitors and competitors into the township each year.

In the early decades of the 21st Century, Forrest had undergone a remarkable development, catering for the growing number of visitors to the township. This has resulted in the establishment of a successful brewery/cafe, coffee shop/bike store, a revived guest house and a renovated Hotel. Christmas and Easter holidays often see the camping ground almost full to capacity.

While dairying and other local industries have declined the township has become popular for retirees and those seeking an alternative lifestyle. Forrest township has an exciting future.