

## CHAPTER 4

# EXPLORATION EXPEDITION TO MILDURA

As mentioned in previous sections, the ultimate destination of Mildura loomed large in the planning of the Victorian rail system in the north-west part of the State. Many points of extension to the Mildura area were promoted. Bendigo and Ballarat interests were vitally concerned that the extension had a link with their city. Mr Robert Gorrie, Secretary of the Shire of Birchip and later Secretary of the Cronomby Tanks to Mildura League convinced the Birchip Shire Council that an expedition from the Shire should explore the route and establish beyond dispute which link would provide the most benefit for the colony.

At the Birchip Shire Council meeting of 26th September 1898 it was resolved that "*Secretary Gorrie and Cr J.P. Neyland be appointed to explore and thoroughly examine the country from Cronomby Tanks to Mildura with a view to laying a report before the Railways Standing Committee and Parliament*". It also agreed to advise the Maryborough based League of which Gorrie was then Secretary that "*this Council is taking active steps to have information collected*" and to also advise the Railway Standing Committee of its actions.

### OUTWARD JOURNEY

The exploring expedition was fitted out by the Shire of Birchip. Gorrie and Neyland left Birchip on horseback each leading a pack horse. They took with them waterbags, cooking utensils, provisions of tea, sugar, salt, flour, bread, a variety of tinned foods, blankets, hammocks, a tent fly for covering, tomahawks, guns and ammunition, hobbles, bells and all the paraphernalia of a well equipped exploring party. The departure was witnessed by a large crowd of townspeople.

The party planned to criss-cross the direct line from Cronomby, via Minapre and Ouyen, to Mildura and thus assess and classify the quality of the land for its economic worth. The extent of the area to be covered was to be approximately ten miles on either side of the line.

The following narrative is an abridged version of an account of the expedition by "*Bilbilbourie*" which was printed in the *Birchip Advertiser* over a number of weeks in serial form. Bilbilbourie is an Aboriginal word meaning "*a long track or road*". The author, of course, was Robert Gorrie.

Gorrie and Neyland went directly to Marlbed on Monday, 3rd October, where they were joined by Cr Peter Scott. Scott was a nephew of Neyland. They stayed the night at Marlbed. One of the packhorses, Billy by name, objected most violently to being impressed as a beast of burden. He tore at his pack with his teeth and squealed with rage. He got rid of the pack several times in the first couple of days.

Tuesday found the party en route to Minapre where the exploration was to start in earnest. Billy continued to resist for much of the day but eventually resigned himself to the inevitable. The party met the railway line some three miles north of Curyo. Following the line, they met several gangs of men working. They passed Hinneberg's (allotment 50 Curyo) where they came across Honan Brothers sinking a tank for the Council. Billy managed to get rid of one of the waterbags. At Cronomby they found the Railways Department had started constructing a twelve thousand cubic yards tank not far from the station. Parties were clearing roads and the site for a station. Continuing northwards they passed a settler's place and saw fifty sheep contentedly feeding in a small enclosure of rape. A mile further along they met a team of six horses harnessed two abreast to a Mallee Roller, which the driver told them was called a Mallee Tiger. It had an ordinary frame mounted on two wheels with a pole about twenty feet long resting on a third wheel. The superstructure forward and above the frame was eight feet high in order to catch the trees higher up than an ordinary roller. This gave a better leverage for crushing down the heavy timber. Gorrie was not impressed with the job it was doing. They arrived at Minapre (Lascelles) about 5.30pm, went to a deserted hut and prepared to settle down for the night. However, a Mr Adams, who lived about thirty chains from the hut came to meet them. He had been deputed by Mr Lascelles to extend hospitality to them and to give them a letter and a plan showing the land traversed by two of Lascelles' men previously sent to view the land. The hut contained a bag stretcher and a small table mounted on four sticks stuck into the ground. Neyland and Scott slept on the floor while Gorrie occupied the "*bach*". They were awakened early by the cold but lit a fire, warmed themselves and went back to sleep.

Next morning, Wednesday, 5th October, Adams escorted them on a tour of Minapre. The township was laid out artistically and the oval although a natural one "*compared favourably with the famous Maryborough Recreation Ground*". They then travelled westward, accompanied by Adams. En route the little mare, the other packhorse, outdid Billy as a good specimen of a

bucker. Head and tail seemed to meet under her, she squealed viciously and kicking at the waterbag on her side drove her hoof nearly through it. The country for the next five miles was covered with dense mallee, pine and open land covered with tussocks. It was splendid country. Turning north-east, they found a good part of the mallee had been burnt and the dead wood was leaning in all directions. The undergrowth had also grown some four feet high thus making passage through it very difficult. The line of march became a camel train. Adams on a white horse leading, breaking down saplings and generally clearing a space; Neyland with a loaded Martini in his hand followed; then came Scott leading Billy behind him while Gorrie with a double barrel LB gun in his hand, brought up the rear with the little mare in lead. The track was so tortuous that often the leader would be backtracking within a few feet of the rest of the party going forward. In such fashion they eventually reached Overalls Tank situated on the north of Block 48B, (now allot 9 Gama). There was plenty of water and after hobbling them, the horses were left to graze on a small clearing about one mile distant from the Tank. The party was pleased with the quality of the land and recorded that "*it was as good as the famous Marbled land*". They startled two mallee hens and saw an emu but never fired a shot at them. At this point they found survey marks that had been made by the Donald-Wentworth survey several years previously.

On Thursday, 6th October, the party had breakfast and were started by 7.30am with the waterbag repaired and replenished. Adams took his departure. They followed the survey line for about half a mile but found it too difficult so veered north-westerly for nine miles through undulating land of good class until they struck a wire netting fence. They lowered the wires and passed through, returning the wires to their original position. Burnt mallee had been the order of the day and it presented a scene of desolation. There was no bird nor animal life of any description except flies by the million. The utter solitude and desolation depressed their spirits as they moved through this stretch before changing direction. It was recorded as "*inferior land with sand and sand rises*". The sand was being driven through the air like dust by the strong north wind. Frequent calls were made on the waterbag. With no grass or water for the horses they pushed on. There was no point in stopping their northwards advance. They had been in the saddle since early morning. Deviating easterly they saw some pines which they reached by 7pm. There was about a quarter of an acre of open land with crab holes having a sprinkling of thin grass. They resolved to camp for the night. Hobbling the horses they had some tea, the first food they had

taken since breakfast time. They tied up the horses for the night. Without water for the entire day, the horses kept neighing throughout the night. Gorrie woke at 3am and heard the tinkling of bells. He got up to find two of the horses missing. With the aid of torches made of blazing pine branches they found the horses about a mile from the camp. It was raining lightly enough to get them wet to the skin. Neyland sought his hat for protection from the rain. On retrieving it, an "*unearthly yell escaped his lips and the hat came flying towards the fire. Out rolled an immense stump tail lizard*". He later found a large centipede had also made its temporary home within the hat but quickly emptied it onto the fire, where the group sat, dried themselves and waited for daylight.

Anxious for water and feed for the horses, and as well, the waterbags were almost exhausted, they got an early start on Friday, 7th October. It was planned to continue on their present line for two hours and if no water was found, to head for Ouyen. As an emergency measure, if there was no water at Ouyen, they would travel out to Tiegee where it was known there was an abundance of water. The appearance of each of the party caused much amusement. Individually each resembled the "*Minstrels*", being covered in all exposed body parts with soot from the previous day's trip through the burnt mallee. To add further to his discomfort, Scott had been bitten on the lip by some unknown creature. His swollen face induced Gorrie to describe him as capable of being taken for "*the wild man from Borneo*". Passing through copi country for some two miles they found a supply of silver grass but no water. The horses were left to graze while the trio drained the waterbags to get enough water to make a pot of tea to enjoy with their breakfast. After a good look around they found some water in a clay pan. While Neyland held the horses back, Gorrie and Scott scooped out a hole on the edge of the pan with their hands and ran the water into it. They then led the horses, one by one, to it for a limited drink. From that point the party headed westwards for Ouyen, estimated to be ten miles distant. Billy by now was well broken in and followed the other horses without being led. The mare, however, was not so tractable and had to be led. This stretch of country was classified as first-class with wild geraniums and yellow everlasting covering the patches of open land.

After six miles of travel, the party came across several head of cattle on a small plain and then a large tank, where the horses had a good drink and were hobbled and let graze on the rich grass on the flat. A thunderstorm broke while the party was eating. It was a curious mixture of dust, hail, food and camp gear

that met their gaze from where they sheltered in the lea of a pine tree. Little sign of animal or bird life was evident. When eventually a kangaroo hopped into sight, Neyland tried to get a shot at it but was too slow. It disappeared into the scrub. The party struck out for Nulkwyne and covered fourteen miles that afternoon before making camp at 6.30pm for the night. Making the best of the environmental assets, they slept that night on fragrant beds of pine branches. This was fortuitous as it rained during the night and they were kept off the damp ground by the depth of their "mattresses". A strange phenomenon of ground formation characterized the area. Large holes on the flat appeared where the rain had penetrated the cracks in the ground and the lime formation had caused perpendicular hollows about three feet deep to form. They became horse hazards but no accidents occurred.

Saturday, 8th October broke dull and cloudy. Rain threatened. Proceeding northwards through good class land for five miles, the country suddenly became inferior. Deviating east by north-east for a further five miles, they met a team of a dozen shearers returning from New South Wales sheds on their way to Hopetoun. Gorrie gave them a letter to post addressed to friends at Birchip. The place was known as Kia and was twenty miles south of Kulkyne. Proceeding northwards they passed through *"some of the most curious country that had been our lot to meet with"*. When leaving Marlbed, Jimmy, the blackfellow, said that the party would *"come across a country that was red and that the trees were all red"*. It was copi country and the horses sank up to their fetlocks, each step raising the dust which was as red as ochre. The trees were covered red up to three feet from ground level. After three miles the land became first-class again. Travelling another six miles they came onto the first of the Kulkyne Lakes. The grass was abundant for the horses. Dinner that night saw the last of the Birchip bread. The lakes were dry and were ringed by red gum trees of all sizes. One measured thirty-three feet in circumference. Turtle shells and the skeletons of fish abounded. One fish skeleton measured four feet three inches in length. White cockatoos were numerous and evidently the lakes were their home.

Travelling northwards they reached Chalka's Creek, an overflow of the Murray flowing into the Kulkyne lakes. When the lakes fill, it flows back into the Murray below Kulkyne station. They forded the creek with difficulty, the packs getting wet in the process. Many varieties of flora and bird life were evident. Gorrie reported that crested pigeons, various kinds of parrots and willock wollocks were seen. Everlasting flowers

averaging the size of a florin were plentiful. Tobacco plants, the favourite plant of the early squatters, had taken possession of large tracts of land.

Unsaddling that night, it was found that Billy had got rid of the hobbles from his pack. Nothing daunted, Scott and Neyland started back to find them while Gorrie cooked some johnny cakes for supper. Scott and Neyland returned after dark unsuccessful in their quest. Stirrup straps were used as an effective improvisation.

Next morning, Sunday, 9th October, Scott and Neyland resumed the search. This time they found the hobbles back near where they had forded the creek. Flies continued to be a source of discomfort to the degree that Gorrie recorded *"we thought that if we did not develop Barcoo Rot we would be fortunate"*. Continuing westwards they passed over first-class country with good timber coverage and specimens of pigface plants. Crossing three fences, one was dog-proof with solid wood posts placed one chain apart. Eight iron droppers, four long and four short, interspersed each span. Rabbits were numerous. Other signs of occupation included an old log tank with water in it and a kerosine tin on the edge. Camp was built for the night.

On Monday, 10th October an early start was made but not before a snake was found under Gorrie's blankets. Falling over backwards Gorrie called out *"snake"*. Neyland sprang for his rifle and Scott made a grab for his gun. Gorrie got a stick and lifted the blanket to reveal the coiled enemy. Shots rang out from all barrels. When the smoke cleared about a foot of snake was wriggling around on the ground and a glimpse was caught of the rest disappearing down a hole directly under where Gorrie had slept. That day Chaffey Brother's woolshed on the banks of the Murray was reached. The country was labelled as good. They were then at what is now Red Cliffs. With cliffs fully one hundred and twenty feet high, it was difficult to get the horses down to water. But the old adage of taking a horse to water but can't make it drink was proved true. The steepness of the slope deterred the animals from reaching down for water. However the expeditioners made good use of the noble stretch of water to clean up ready for arrival at Mildura, nine miles distant, before dark. Cultivated areas were encountered some six miles from Mildura. They passed the pumping station, struck 11th Street and followed that street into Mildura.

## AT MILDURA:

At Mildura the party was feted by the leading personalities of the settlement, including President of the Shire, Cr Bames, the Chaffey Brothers, Mr De Garis and Dr Abramowski. They were wined and dined and escorted on tours of the district. Much development had taken place since the Chaffey Brothers had commenced irrigation in 1887. Produce of all kinds of foodstuffs were being grown in commercial quantities. Quality was of a high standard. Wines were compared favourably with Bests at Armstrongs. Olives were freely offered to the visitors. Dr Abramowski's olive oil was voted "*superior quality and equal if it did not surpass the best in Victoria*". Gorrie noted that in the Birchip district a family needed six hundred and forty acres to make a living while only ten was required with irrigation. The population was estimated at twelve hundred and new settlers arrived daily by almost every steamer. The need for a railway connection was becoming urgent if the settlement was to progress satisfactorily. The Mildura Councillors and other dignitaries were grateful to the Birchip Shire Council for its active interest and to the members of the expedition for their personal involvement in the rail cause.

While in Mildura, the news was received that the Railways Standing Committee had recommended the construction of the Mildura connection from Ultima. This upset the party because the Birchip Shire Council had asked that a decision on the Mildura link be deferred until the exploration party had returned, made their report and were able to give evidence to the Standing Committee.

## THE RETURN TRIP:

The return trip was commenced on Friday, 14th October. They reached Chaffey's woolshed and came to Caradoc Station by dinner time. They called at the station but only an old man was there and he could not give them any information regarding the locality. Fifty acres of irrigated wheat was seen but it was very patchy and would only yield a bag to the acre. They continued along the river, saw some splendid river flats with an abundance of grass but there was little or no stock on it. After travelling to within nine miles of Kulkynne they found a nice quiet place on the banks of the Murray River. It was a good spot to spend their first night back on the trail. The hospitality received at Mildura needed time to work itself out of their systems.

Next day they got off to a good start at 8.15am and went as far as the boundary fence with the droppers

which they had come through on their forward journey. Here they met a Mr Heckmore who was waiting with a buggy and pair for the arrival of his uncle, Mr Robertson, on the steamer from Mildura. Mr Robertson was the manager of Kulkynne Station. The steamer would pick up and set down passengers at any point along the river if a landing place could be found. The party had been given a letter of introduction to the station staff to provide hospitality to them. On arrival at the station, Mrs Scott, the housekeeper, made them welcome. Mr Robertson and his nephew arrived shortly afterwards. The group were guests of the station for that day and included a tour of inspection of the property during the afternoon. It was noted that there were ten Aboriginees on the station. With the exception of one lubra, they all lived in huts. Robertson was a black protector and the Aborigines possessed several wagonettes and horses which they used for their frequent migrations. When asked why they never went into the Mallee, one old man named Euston Jerry, replied that "*all old folks liked to stay long at waterholes, not liked to go away from water-plenty fish there-nofish in the Mallee*". Snake stories occupied the night of conversation with Mr Heckmore and Mr Robertson. Heckmore told of "*a huge snake near Chalka's Creek. It was found coiled up near a log. The coils appeared to cover a space of five or six yards. Within the coils lay three dead rabbits. While he and his boundary rider watched in amazement, the snake took up one of the rabbits, merely opened its mouth and the rabbit gradually proceeded to its internal home. The same procedure was accorded the other two rabbits. Slowly uncoiling itself, the snake stretched out for a rest when its eye caught sight of a fourth rabbit at the end of the log. Just as it was about to open its mouth to deal with this morsel, it caught sight of the watchers and made for the hollow log. The boundary rider grasped it by the tail. The snake quickly wrapped itself around the man's arm and started pulling him into the log. His hands had disappeared when Heckley came to the rescue. He uncoiled the snake from the boundary rider's arm and released him from his inevitable doom*". After hearing this yarn, the group politely retired to bed.

Sunday, 16th October broke with a fierce north wind blowing hot like an oven. Mildura land was changing hands without payment on that day. Robertson gave them a good supply of bread and mutton. About eight miles down the track they met two Aborigines droving a mob of two hundred cattle from the Ouyen and Tieggee districts. They were bound for the Mildura and Wentworth markets. The drovers said that Gorrie and his companions would have to pass through a big desert. The party again crossed Chalka's Creek which

was still running strongly. They filled their waterbags in preparation for possible emergencies. Adopting the same order as on the forward trek, Neyland in front with rifle, Gorrie in the centre leading the pack mare and Billy following loose, Scott bringing up the rear and carrying his musket, the procession moved onwards. About two miles further on they met two stockmen taking a mob of horses and ponies to Kulkyne. They advised Gorrie and party not to venture to the eastwards, the Ultima direction, but to take the track to Kia and so on to Ouyen as the country which they proposed to pass through was a sand desert and utterly waterless. After completing some thirty miles from Kulkyne they decided to stop for the day at 7pm after passing through a ridge of fallen pine trees. One of the horses ran a splinter into its shoulder. The horses were restless and needed constant supervision that night.

Next morning it was found that one of the waterbags had been punctured and all the water had escaped. Another had a hole in it and had lost most of its contents. It was necessary to head direct for Kia to get water for themselves and their horses. Going westward, the country was very inferior with many sand rises and stunted Mallee. They reached Kia and had their first meal for the day. The horses waded into the water waist deep and plunged their heads up to their eyes into the water as they drank. With waterbags repaired and filled, later that day they proceeded east and south-easterly for six miles where they found a survey peg and presumed that it was along the Sea Lake trial rail survey. It was a dreary and lonesome trip for the next sixteen miles. *"Nothing but sand and porcupine and burnt mallee meeting the eye and at every turn solitude and silence"*, wrote Gorrie. Tracks of wild cattle were observed. They followed the tracks hoping that they might lead them to water. However the tracks spread out and were lost. Night fell without any further incidents.

On Tuesday, 18th October an early start was made at 6am. In their hunger, the horses had stripped all the bark off the trees during the night. About two miles out on the track a few tufts of spear grass were found. The horses devoured them in quick time. Some more spear grass was found about another mile further on. It, too, disappeared very rapidly. The party was becoming very dishevelled in appearance due to the rough going and the lack of water to spruce up. By now the horses had been twenty-four hours without water and the waterbags were running low. Neyland was feeling the need for damper to sate his appetite. Efforts to meet this demand were poorly met with a burnt offering of what was intended to be a damper.

Fortunately the weather was cool. The landscape was *"sand, sand and nothing but sand and burnt mallee as far as we could see in all directions, truly this was a desert"*, wrote Gorrie of this section of the journey. They were located at Mount Lookout on Lot 26B, some nine miles north-west of Lake Tyrrell. Ruminating on the desolate scene it occurred to them that *"the advocates of a railway from the east should be compelled to come to this mount and view the country for themselves and if they persisted the government should authorize their examination by three legally qualified medical practitioners with a view of ascertaining whether they were not fit and proper subjects for her most gracious Majesties compassion and care at Ararat or Yarra Bend"*. Some six or eight miles south from the mount, the country rapidly improved but still there was no water for the horses. The supply in the waterbags had been reduced to a mouthful for each of the party. Their tongues and throats were parched and they drained the bags dry. Erecting the fly between two trees, they *"lay down in their clothes, supperless, thirsty and thoroughly tired out"*. A storm broke out at 9pm; a regular hurricane, it tore the fly away, broke off limbs, uprooted trees, the fire was blown away, but scarcely any rain. They huddled together for the rest of the night to keep warm. With nothing to eat since noon the previous day and with nothing to drink, their thoughts turned to morbid subjects such as the Scotsman who became lost from a fencing party some twenty years previously and only survived by the merest good fortune. They pondered the strange tracks which they had seen in the Chalka's Creek area. Euston Jimmy explained that turtles travel strange distances and this particular one was colourfully described as *"him gone longa creek and pull away alonga Lake Mournpool"*. Thoughts of the scene of desolation at Mount Lookout were indelibly imprinted on their minds and kept recurring.

Wednesday, 19th October began with a body warming session in front of the fire to ease the pain of their cramped limbs. They tried to get some water from the roots of Mallee trees but gave up without obtaining any moisture. They had empathy with the horses and had not the heart to push them along. About 9am Neyland who was a little ahead of the rest coo-eed excitedly at the sight of the bank of a tank ahead. When they reached it they found, to their disgust, that it was a new construction and was dry. They judged their location to be about four miles due east of Overalls Tank; so they started westward. It was imperative that they find it and do so quickly. After about a mile they came across a track they recognized. Letting the mare and Billy loose, the horses started off at a smart walk which gradually went into a trot and

finally a canter. The conclusion was that they had got a smell of water and were making all speed to it. The other horses caught the excitement and had to be restrained to prevent them from galloping towards the tank. Finally Overalls Tank was reached. The horses drank as though they were going to burst. Each of the men laid down on the edge of the water and drank to replenishment. They also had a wash by throwing water over each other. They then made a meal as they had not eaten since 11am on the previous day. The horses also found some grass to eat. The party was anxious to reach Minapre and left Overalls Tank at 2.30pm for that destination. On the way they came across three circular tanks, one of which had been brick lined. The water in the brick one was quite fresh but the others had a sweet taste. The tanks were perfectly round, six feet in diameter and had been dug by a contractor for Mr Lascelles. The method of construction was interesting. Gorrie sought out the contractor at Minapre and under persistent questioning explained to Gorrie how it was done using a wheel as a template. Water had been found at a depth of forty feet and continued to a depth of sixty-three feet. The party spent the night at Minapre in the same hut they occupied on the forward trip. The howl of dingoes broke the monotony of the night. Neyland felt that it gave the wayfarers the feeling of being back into civilization.

A leisurely start was made to Thursday, 20th October. Not rising till 8am they had breakfast but when they went for their horses they were missing having escaped from their paddock via a broken panel. Two young men had sighted them two miles down the road. Billy, the mare and Gorrie's horse were found about 10am but Scott and Neyland's horses were nowhere to be seen. Eventually Neyland turned up with them and they moved off towards Cronomby Tanks, a distance of about nine miles. The crops around Minapre were suffering from want of rain. They were worse towards Hopetoun and would be almost a total failure. They reached Cronomby Tanks about 12.30pm and found good progress had been made with the railway tank. Gorrie, Scott and Neyland had dinner with Mr McDonald, the contractor and his family. McDonald was carrying out his work in a most systematic manner and was experimenting as to which was the cheaper method of excavation, scooping or using drays.

Anxious to reach home the same day, the party moved off as soon as they could for Maribed. Travelling along the railway line as far as Hinneberg's they found the tank almost completed. At the Newer tank they found it full of water and "a grand site it looked". Ultimately Scott's home was reached at 5.30pm,

thoroughly tired and not sorry to be nearly finished their long journey. A sorry homecoming awaited them. Scott's son, Neil, had met with an accident and had been taken to hospital at St. Amaud by his mother. This upset changed their plans. They stayed the night at Scott's home and at 7am proceeded to Birchip the next morning in time for Scott to catch the train to St. Amaud.

The party was given a warm welcome by the townspeople. They had achieved the purpose of the journey. They could report that the Birchip Shire Council was justified in advocating the railway extension to Mildura via Cronomby Tanks. It proved worthy of their support. It also proved that the best land between Mildura and other competing points was inferior to that of the Cronomby Tanks route.

Soon afterwards the party presented its report to the Shire Council showing the nature of the country and a map of the area traversed. This report did not contain any narrative like the serialized version later printed in the *Birchip Advertiser*. Rather it was a methodical and clinical account of the expedition.

In appreciation of the services rendered by Robert Gorrie to the successful outcome of the rail extension to Mildura, he was tendered a complimentary concert, presentation of a purse of one hundred sovereigns and a Testimonial in the Birchip Mechanics Hall on 23rd December 1900. The function was attended by a large crowd of local people and visitors. The speakers included the Chairman of the Maryborough League, Mr J. Logan, who was Chairman for the occasion. Apologies were received from all of the local Parliamentarians. In his response, Mr Gorrie paid special tributes to Crs Neyland and Scott who shared many of the events that led to the success of the project.

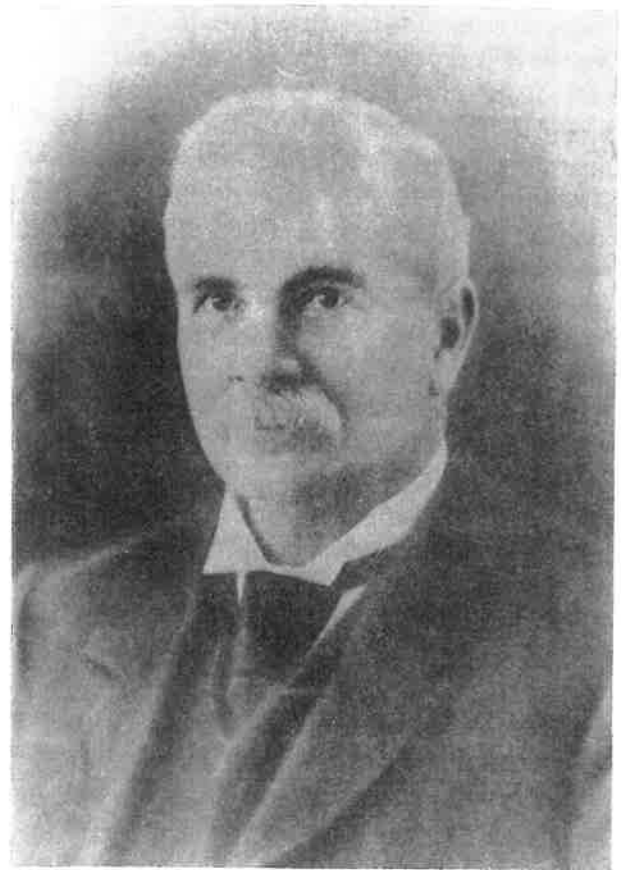
Curyo people abstained from the Birchip presentation and staged their own recognition of the services of Mr Gorrie. On 15th Jan 1901, the Curyo Hall was packed out and overflowing as 150 people gathered to witness the occasion. Mr Philip Grogan occupied the chair. A marquee was improvised with tarpaulins and tables set out with a variety of consumables. Mr Hinneberg was Vice-Chairman. Numerous toasts were honoured while the Chairman proposed the toast to Robert Gorrie. It was seconded by Mr Hinneberg and supported by other speakers. Eulogies of the finest oratory were delivered praising his efforts and his character. He was presented with a purse of 30 sovereigns amid great applause. In his response, Gorrie again paid tribute to all those other people who

had worked so hard to ensure the success of the rail project. He said that *"he had not been used to the saddle and his personal sufferings would not have permitted him to go on after the first day had he not the assistance of his friends, Crs Scott and Neyland"*. He recounted other incidents of the trip to Mildura in which his friends had borne much of the hardship of the day. He concluded by saying that he was advocating a water supply for Curyo by means of the Lake Lonsdale Scheme. He had seen plans for a channel which would flow past Kelly's Plains in a few years time.

Mr Gorrie resigned as Secretary of the Shire of Birchip in November 1903, the very same time that the Mildura line was opened for traffic. He moved to the Borough of Ararat as its Secretary. Unfortunately he did not enjoy good health for very long and took leave to recuperate from illness in 1908. It was a short lived period and he died at his home in Ararat on 16th Jan 1909. Many tributes from all parts of the State were paid to his service and his character.

Gorrie's story offers much to be admired. The fact that Birchip and other stations in the Shire are located on the Mildura line ensures that rail services, restricted though they may be, will always be a part of the transport system serving this community.

*Cr. Peter Scott.*



*Robert Gorrie.*

*Cr. J. P Neyland.*



present. From Wycheproof came Messrs Sheehan, McMaster, Allan, Theobald, Gray, Durie, Small, Hogan, O'Keefe, Pearce and McDougall. Statistics and other relevant information were placed before the Committee indicating the extent of the land that would be served to a distance of eight miles on either side of the proposed line.

Almost simultaneously, Minister for Railways Billson, stated that *"until the people without any railway communication had had lines built for them, he thought the State could not entertain these proposals for cross-country lines"*. Nevertheless the Standing Committee continued hearings regarding Birchip-Wycheproof and Lascelles-Hopetoun connections. Estimates were that nearly 300,000 bags of wheat would be produced between the Birchip section and Ouyen and it was therefore important that the two lines under question be inter-locked with the Mildura line. Stock numbers too were on the increase providing more volume traffic. Access to markets at Bendigo, Ballarat and Newmarket would be facilitated by such a linkage.

Further evidence and a motor tour over the proposed lines were carried out by the Standing Committee in April 1913. All further construction was postponed during WW 1 hostilities. It was not until September 1918 that a deputation of residents waited on Minister Barnes at Birchip to put new life into the old saga. It was pointed out to him that the proposed Wycheproof-Birchip line would run within four miles of Corack to give that area much needed rail facilities. Wycheproof concurred in a new alignment as against the previously proposed straight line connection. Many advantages were pointed out including the greater flexibility that it would give the Department in haulage to markets and the seaboard. Mr Lockwood spoke of the amount of business generated since Birchip and Wycheproof had been connected by telephone. He was supported by Mr Lilburne, who had been farming in the district for eight years and had grown 2000 bags of wheat in the past three years. He was now reverting to grazing on account of the cartage difficulties. Mr R. J. Barber confidently recommended the project to the Minister as being of much economic benefit to all concerned as well as the department. Minister Barnes responded by saying that sufficient evidence had been tendered to enable him to put the proposal before Parliament to decide whether the matter should be further investigated by the Railway Standing Committee. That body would then make a firm recommendation to Parliament on the subject. Presently the government was committed to £1,000,000 expenditure on railway lines. On 21st Dec. 1918 Parliament adopted a motion

that all cross-country proposals be referred to the Railway Standing Committee. Additionally a Corack-Bangerang proposal was also to be considered.

In October 1919 a public meeting at Birchip again went into action. Residents from Wycheproof, Thalia and Birchip attended. It finally resolved that the route of the proposed line be as follows *"From Birchip via E. Lee's, W. McMaster's thence south of Mr Le Leveirs's and from there to Wycheproof"*. Delegates were arranged to present the case.

In November 1923 the Progress Association again brought up the matter of the Charlton-Birchip connection via Corack. The meeting on the motion of Messrs Lockwood and Cutts resolved to form a League to sponsor the cause. By comparison to other proposals it was a short-lived exercise. In July 1925, the request to connect Corack-Granite Flat and Wooroonooke with a rail service was refused. In December 1927 the Railways Standing Committee deemed it not expedient to construct a connection between Charlton and Birchip. Hereafter Birchip efforts were concentrated on improving the existing services and were never again to be involved in promoting cross-country connections.

#### **KINNABULLA-MINYIP CONNECTION:**

Settlers in the area bounded by the Donald-Birchip line on the east and Minyip-Warracknabeal-Beulah on the western side were many miles removed from a rail siding. Some were close to 20 miles distant, which in horse and bullock days was considerably more than a day's round trip to deliver farm products. It followed naturally that they should endeavour to mount a case for a branch or cross-country link to provide better access. In April 1919 they decided to form a League with other interested parties and promote their cause. The Kinnabulla-Minyip Railway League was born and pursued the objective of a link between those two points or, alternately, a Kinnabulla-Sheep Hills connection.

A series of meetings followed to marshal data required to place a serious case before the Standing Committee when hearings commenced in October 1919. The statistics gathered provided substantial evidence of the productivity and hence, the value of the land. It was priced in evidence as between £3/5/- and £4 per acre. Additionally there was much land made vacant by people leaving the area that could be used for Soldier Settlement if a rail service was available. Mr J. Warren of Reedy Dam was most active in arranging for the Railway Standing Committee to investigate the scheme. He said that he had been in the district for 30