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COOLGARDIE

Christmas at the Old Camp

LOOKING BACK TO 1892 AND 1893

G. Spencer Compton

Two Christmas periods on the early Eastern Goldfields were important — the first one after Bayley's Find in September, 1892; and the second after Hannan's Find in 1893. Conditions in the bush were dry and hot, and there was great anxiety about the welfare of all men placed so far forward of Southern Cross, the nearest established place, 110 miles away.

In 1892 as the year drew to its dry close, despite the hardships and the considerable difficulties about water, there was appreciation of the comforts—primitive in many ways—that the young settlement of COOLGARDIE had to offer. True! there was little real comfort, nor any great variety of goods to be got; but men who were "on gold" wanted to hang on as long as possible. Most of them needed badly what they could get.

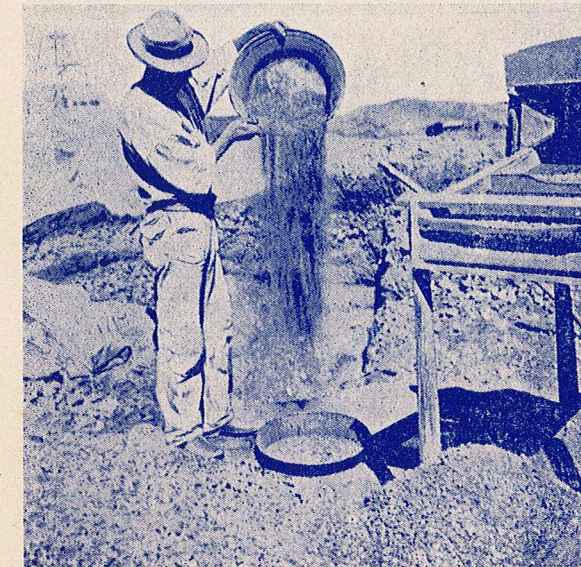
The population was about 300; two women had arrived (Mrs. Felix Murphy and her daughter Edith; Edith was one of the first white girls into Southern Cross in 1889.) Swelling the ranks of the diggers were some rather important personages in Lord Percy Douglas and the Hon. David Carnegie who had come from England and were sampling life on the Diggings; Sylvester Browne also, with Everard Browne and Gordon Lyon. These men were among those who were the first

Christmas Hosts to small groups of men in this far away new place; groups partaking of simple fare in the most simple manner "in the bush." Father Treacy, the first cleric had come for a time; and two Salvation Army men in Lonnie and Bensley were on the scene, with thoughts of good will and help where needed.

Late in the month teams of camels had come in through Gnarlbine, "loaded to gunwales" as it were with supplies greatly needed. A fortnightly mail had been started from Southern Cross, which was a great boon, for it brought comfort to many, providing news of the outside world or from anxious relatives; and it allowed scope for the civic activities of Bill Benstead; or his good nature; for he acted as butcher in one tent and postmaster in the other. To some men mails were more necessary than meat!

Jim Speakman—and his mates—the Finders of Gold at Ularring twelve months earlier (October, 1891) had come in from the 25-Mile, to tell about another Find of Gold at that place; but also to say how they had to give up and quit the place because of lack of water. (In subsequent proceedings, although being the rightful finders, they lost the claims). Fourteen teams were now carting from Southern Cross or bringing in water from Gnarlbine Rocks (20 miles away); and it was

considered opinion that the water there was likely to give out at any moment. It was said that there were hundreds of men waiting at Southern Cross, ready to move on to Rich Coolgardie—with an eye on every cloud in the sky, and just waiting for the rain to set their feet on the track.



A DRYBLOWER AT WORK

"Dry-blowing" was a dry, dusty and dirty job; and uncomfortable; with water supply failing even a wash was almost impossible. Warden Finnerty at his tent-office posted a notice that urged as many men as possible to move back to Southern Cross—in small parties so as to be a minimum drain on the available water.

But there was good news too! and much to keep men anchored on their claims on Fly Flat or Pig Gully. Enough were getting gold to buoy-up others with hopes for similar success; Bayley and Ford had "gone down" (to Southern Cross) with 600 ozs., and with a possible chance of 200 or 300 ozs. in their dollied tailings. Rumour had it that "Sylvester Browne had bought The Reward"—£6000 cash the gossips said; the price seemed fabulous, and hands went up! while all hearts beat strongly at such encouragement.

Christmas fare was frugal for all. The little parties round the tents and small fires "boiled the billies" and partook of the Tinned meat, tinned pudding and "Billy Tea" cheerfully or thankfully—with the spirit of "Good-will to All" triumphant over all the handicaps of adversity or hard living. For a time the dust from "The Flat" was forgotten; quiet

reigned and friendship ruled. The short break was welcome; but not for long! Soon the men were back at the old dirty occupation.

Twenty points of rain in early January (the New Year 1893) started men on the move again, including those at Southern Cross who had waited so patiently for the clouds to gather—and break.



THEIR CHRISTMAS DINNER OUT BACK

The "bush" in every direction round about now resounded to the feet of wandering men and parties; some of them successful, as events proved. The next Christmas (of 1893) was approached under much the same conditions as to water, and provisions as before—exceedingly difficult, and still a "long way out." But this time there were extra "fields" open; and more men scattered about. Hannans (found in June) and the very young White Feather, as well as settlements right through the 25-Mile; 45-Mile to the 90-Mile with men all doing fairly well, and some of them even happy with their results or present good fortune. By this time most men had seen gold in quantity, and most of them too had begun to learn the ways of the bush and the tricks of gold finding. The splendid results from Sylvester Browne's work at Bayleys was a lesson to all, setting a high tempo to life; all were heartened, and at least there were great hopes and expectations! Gold was King!

Very dry and thirsty conditions had to be faced in all these centres; although there were hundreds of teams on the roads; but water more precious than ever. As the days drew near to the second Christmas again the word went round from Warden Finnerty at Coolgardie and Gledden at Hannans "Get Back to the Cross;" and general exemption was

granted to free men from the necessity of manning their claims. Quite a number of men did go back—some to Southern Cross only, and others right to the coast—much depended "on the chamois." Cammilleri was one who left his good claim at Hannans—The Brown Hill, and did not return until the next year.

Christmas was coming! and many thought about it!

"The race for wealth was not too fierce
Or greed of gold too great
To keep the people of the 'fields'
From the wish to celebrate."

Christmas Day was on a Sunday; and for almost a week before good weather had prevailed; it was beautiful and all that could be desired. Some rains of a few days before had cooled the air and laid the dust (and provided many with a wash). Christmas Day was sparkling and bright; as charming as at any popular resort.

For days before dusky picanninies had put on a good show, disporting in the overflowing channels of water in, or near Bayley Street. Men with nothing to do stayed to watch the antics of the new types of "water babies."

Bayley's Mine kept on working right up to Saturday night—they had gold to get out—and most of the Dryblower Fraternity did likewise, for many wanted the gold; but from Finds and 'fields from miles around—Hannans, White Feather and as far away as The 90-Mile there seemed to have been a general move into THE OLD CAMP. The rumour had passed round that "Coolgardie would turn it on." The town was filling up with diggers, miners, carters and teamsters, "blowers," "experts" and mining captains, investors; or lookers-on; who all helped to swell the crowd and give to this Christmas Eve a festive and happy air. For did it not mean that Evan Wisdom, Bill Faahan and the two other "pub" keepers would be Hosts to the hosts? Four hotels just bursting with grog, good fare and willingness to entertain! It had not been difficult to persuade the out-back men to the festive boards that the Old Camp would provide.

By this time at every tank, soak or water-hole there was a man placed to collect the one penny per gallon from each man drinking; or sixpence for each horse and a shilling for every camel watered. Some streets in Coolgardie had been named, and attempts made to lay out a town away from the dusty claims; and

there were investors ready, with outside capital, looking the field over, and trying to "get in" if they could; and "rather liking Hannans" where already more than 100 leases (good ones) had been registered. The registering was all done at the Coolgardie office; so the whole place knew what was going on, but few realised at that time what was the real value of the areas pegged so freely; or of the ground that gave so many millions later.

The railway from Northam was creeping out towards Southern Cross, with contractor McDowell hastening its progress, while William Ripper watched progress on behalf of the W.A. Government. (It was opened at Southern Cross in April, 1894): "it might be extended onward soon" some said.

Three hundred men at Hannans looked at the weather, but little could be done on the few pints of water available. It was the same at White Feather, and from Goongarie dire tales came in; all centres were dry. So about 1500 "got back" to Coolgardie for that Christmas; accommodation was limited; and taxed to the utmost, but that was no hardship to most men, used by now to hard ground and hardwood pillows. Hotels did "a roaring trade."

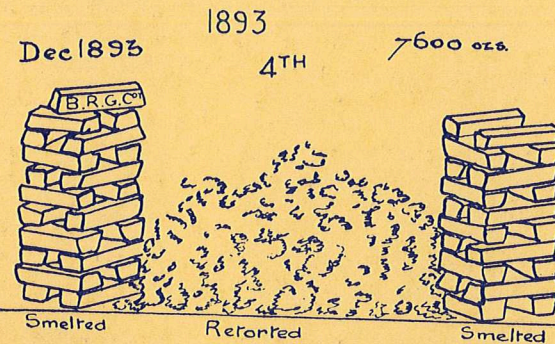
The coming of caravans of camels, well-laden, meant that there were enough stores for

all appetites or thirsts; there were even some items that would please those making fancy purchases or desiring gifts; holiday-makers were well-catered for.

Hotels and "Hop Beer Palaces" did a "roaring trade;" but it all had to be in the correct legal hours, for the "arms of the law" stood by, with careful and watchful eyes; no over-indulgence! Christmas Day itself being on Sunday that was thought to be a handicap for those who might be bibulously inclined; but that was endured. Roysterers were abroad however, with fun and frolicking from the young men, carolling, games and songs; but all with decorum and good humour. Some made excursions to the mines, and Rich Places (like Bayleys) often including the presence of Fair Folk in the parties. Of Religious services there were none, but enthusiastic men of the Salvation Army were "on the job" and helping to spread the thoughts of "Peace on Earth Goodwill to all Men." This was the uppermost and universal thought throughout, the message and spirit of all gatherings.

A Cricket match, in true test-spirit was played between the Employees of Bayleys (Begelhole's Boys) and the members of the newly-formed Coolgardie Club. Among the players were some with quite considerable reputations elsewhere; but of the wicket there

RETROSPECT FOR THE PAST YEAR
PERIOD OF STEADY PROGRESS
Retorted & Smelted GOLD.
BAYLEYS REWARD



were grave doubts. Great interest was taken in the play and the outcome—a win for the town; and of course a lively and lavish spread at the Club afterwards—a Banquet no less—and paid for by Bayleys, the losers; and catered for by Bill Faahan of the Club Hotel, with Begelhole in good form in the Chair.

Of general festivities in the town there were plenty—almost non-stop. On Boxing night a Grand Ball was given by Mr. and Mrs. Faahan—a Howling Success—which thus ended the joy-making and festivities. For Tuesday it was

"Back to the Track, and Dolly and Dish,
To the Pick and Shovel or Shaker;
A lovely nugget the dearest wish
Or hundreds in every acre."

The operations and successes at Bayleys gave the high sign to events and modes of life at that time. The Telegrams that announced these successes were not seen by the Public; but indicate the nature of the production from the new find; and of the value.

20 Dec., 1893. TELEGRAM
From Southern Cross, W.A.
To Harold Cockshott, "Carabella,"
Milson's Point.

"ARRIVED SUNDAY MORNING LEAVING
WITH SEVEN THOUSAND SIX HUNDRED
OUNCES MINE WONDERFUL MERRY
CHRISTMAS.

Gordon Lyon, Everard Browne,

23 Dec., 1893. COOLGARDIE."
From Exchange Station, Melbourne.
To Browne Cockshott, Milson's Point.
"SEVEN THOUSAND SIX HUNDRED
OUNCES WITH GORDON STOP NEXT
DIVIDEND ONE POUND STOP MERRY
CHRISTMAS HAPPY NEW YEAR.
SYLVESTER BROWNE (Vess)."

"Kalgoorlie Miner" Print