Thematic History
1823 – 1945

Cooma-Monaro Shire
New South Wales

The Road Near Colinton 1960
National Archives of Australia

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Victoria Design & Management Pty Ltd

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Illustrations

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1.0   Introduction

1.1   The Report

This report, *Thematic History of the Cooma-Monaro Shire 1823 – 1945*, has been commissioned by Cooma-Monaro Shire Council as part of its Strategic Planning Project which will result in one Local Environmental Plan, Development Control Plan(s), Social Plan and a Natural Resources Action Plan for the whole Shire.

The aim of the project is to provide a European history of the Shire, in the form of a thematic history, which will be a framework against which the cultural significance of non Aboriginal sites in the Shire can be assessed.

Heritage sites offer tangible evidence of the Shire's history and evolution culminating in the present day community. They allow interpretation of lifestyles and customs and require formal acknowledgment to assist protection in the future.

1.2   Study Area

The report focuses on the Cooma-Monaro Shire, as shown on page 2, located on the Monaro, a region in southeast New South Wales. It is south of the Australian Capital Territory, north east of the Snowy Mountains and its tablelands are part of the Great Dividing Range. It comprises the counties of Beresford and the northern portion of Wellesley, two of the 141 counties in NSW. The counties are further divided into parishes[1]. The Shire is irregularly shaped but in general terms runs north south from Deep Creek, north of Michelago, to the McLaughlin River in the south. The Murrumbidgee River defines part of the western boundary and the Tinderry and Kybean ranges, minor ranges of the Great Dividing Range, generally delineate the eastern boundary. The area of the Shire is approximately 6,000 sq kilometres. The northern boundaries of the Shire were adjusted in 2004 to include the village of Michelago and an area to the north of the village, the localities of Clear Range, The Angle and Bumbalong, which were previously part of the Yarrowlumla Shire.

Cooma is the largest town with population of about 8,000 and is the service and business centre for the Monaro and the Snowy regions. There are several villages, Bredbo, Michelago, Nimmitabel and Numeralla, and a number of small settlements.

1.3   Methodology

The report has been prepared in accordance with the NSW Heritage Office's publications *History & Heritage, Investigating History, Community Based Heritage Studies* and *Historical Research for Heritage* and other relevant publications produced by heritage authorities throughout Australia.

Respect for custodians', owners' and local community views regarding heritage places and their value have been taken into account. Liaison with members of the community with an interest in the local heritage has been undertaken.

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[1] www.lands.nsw.gov.au/publications/glossary
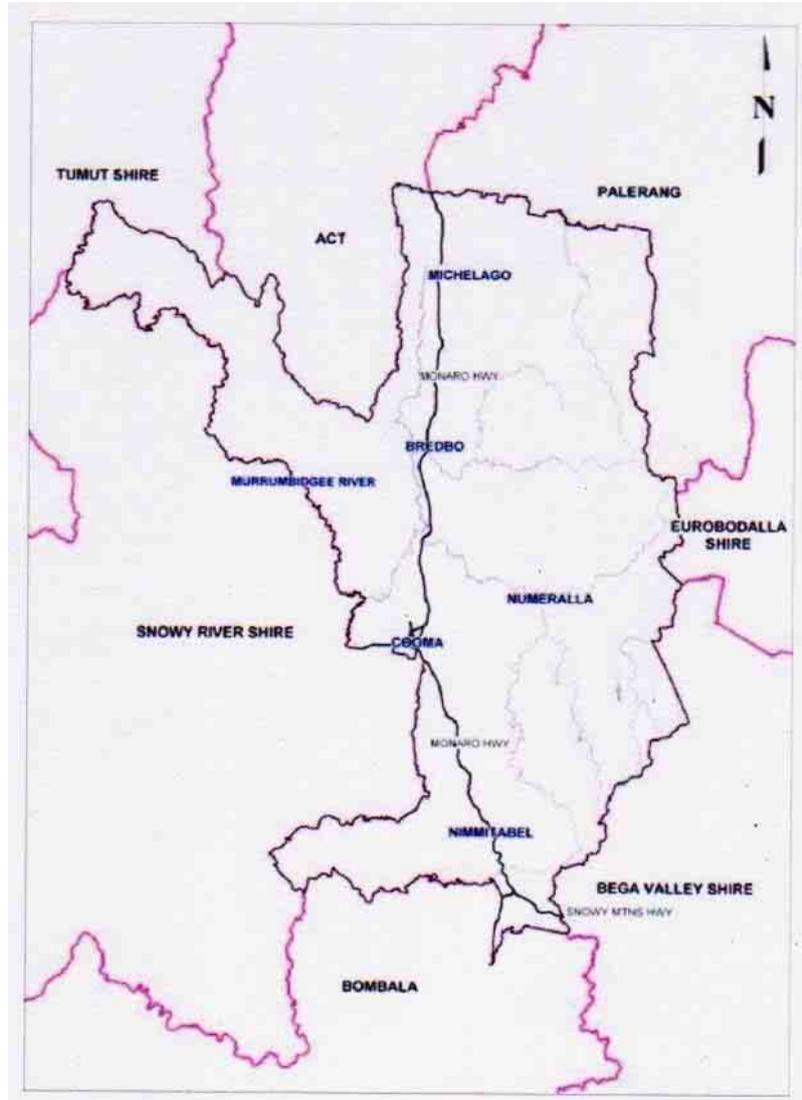
Map showing Cooma-Monaro Shire boundaries
and adjoining shires
Cooma-Monaro Shire

1.4   Limitations

A thematic history deals with history through the interpretation of different relevant themes, as identified by the Australian Heritage Commission (national themes) and the NSW Heritage Office (state themes) and local themes. Therefore it is not a detailed, chronological report of events and dates. A thematic history is not intended to replace other histories already written and designed to serve other purposes. Its purpose is to provide a context and data against which potential heritage items are able to be compared and their values measured. Persons seeking more comprehensive historical information should refer to publications listed in the bibliography.

Every effort has been made to verify dates and historical data included in the thematic history although a number of documents and publications have conflicting accounts. This will have no impact on the outcome of the report but people relying on the information should make their own investigations as to its veracity.

The history primarily focuses on the period between 1823 and 1945 but brief mention has been made of the eras on either side of these years. This should not be taken to infer that these other historical periods are of lesser importance.

With the study completed it is recommended that Cooma-Monaro Shire proceed to conduct a more comprehensive community heritage study.

1.5   Disclaimer

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1.6   Author

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1.7   Acknowledgements

We would like to acknowledge the following people and organizations for their assistance with preparation of this report.

2.0   Ancient Monaro

The land comprising the Cooma-Monaro Shire is an ancient plateau about 800 metres above sea level generally running north south and bounded on the east and west by rugged mountain ranges, part of the Great Dividing Range.

The district displays evidence of four geological periods Devonian (mainly granite types), Silurian and Ordovician (sandstone, slate, shale, quartzite, limestone) and the most recent Tertiary (mainly basalt) which began 100,000,000 years ago. During the Tertiary era there was widespread volcanic activity and 65 eruptions centres have been located on the Monaro[2]. Similar to the existing plateau the geological regions run in a north south direction

The tablelands are composed of areas of granite and basalt soils with outcrops of limestone and are naturally treeless due to soil types, low rainfall, low temperatures and cold air pooling. A distinct tree line can be identified on the slopes of the mountains and ridges, above which grow a number of eucalyptus species. The area south of Cooma is known as the Treeless Plains. There are some significant stony outcrops and stone littered areas resulting from previous ancient volcanic activity. Small rounded mountain, such as The Brothers in the Snowy River Shire, rising out of the plains contribute to the area's distinctive landscape.

The valleys are covered with extensive undulating grasslands intersected by gullies and creeks. From the Murrumbidgee River's headwaters in the Kosciuszko National Park the river flows initially south east then turns north not far from Bunyan. The Numeralla and Bredbo rivers run west conjoining with the Murrumbidgee in the vicinity of Dromore and Bredbo respectively. Other rivers in the Shire are the Big Badja which flows into the Numeralla (previously Umeralla) River at Numeralla and the Queanbeyan which finally links up with the Murrumbidgee in the ACT, the Kybean which flows into the Queanbeyan and the McLaughlin which runs along the southern end of the Shire.

The climate is quite varied and can be changeable. In summer, hot days are followed by temperate nights, while in winter the days are cool to cold and the nights cold and frosty with temperatures regularly falling below 0 degrees C. Each winter brings some light snow falls over most of the district which can be heavier on higher ground. Much of the Shire is in a rain shadow and areas with an annual rainfall less than 500mm are considered to be a semi arid. Rainfall statistics for Cooma in recent years shows varied rainfall pattern from 46% below average rainfall, 298 mm, in 2002/3 to 11% above average rainfall, 550 mm, in 2001/2[3].

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[2] www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au
[3] www.envirionmentcommissioner.act.gov.au/soe/soe2004/Cooma-Monaro/rainfall.htm

3.0 The Ngarigo

Prior to the 1800s the Aboriginal tribe Ngarigo, or Narego, had occupied the greater Monaro district for some 15,000 years. It is believed that the tribe consisted of several hundred people whose language was different, although not entirely dissimilar to that of their neighbours, particularly those to the west known as the Walgalu. Some other tribes considered the Ngarigo and the Walgalu to be the one people[4].

The nomadic tribe moved about in extended family groups of about 20 people who gathered together for ceremonial occasions. The Ngarigo lived permanently on the Monaro but did travel to other areas for trade and ceremonies[5]. Their northern tribal boundaries approximated that of the Cooma-Monaro Shire, probably about one third of their territory which extended over to Thredbo, down to Bombala and across the NSW Victorian border to Suggan Buggan.

One particular aspect of their tribal life, unique to the area, was the annual bogong moth hunt. The moths were found in summer amongst rocks in the mountains and tribes would travel great distances to join in the feasting. Other tribes friendly with the Ngarigo were allowed to participate in the hunt after certain ceremonies and rites had been performed.

The journal[6] of the first explorers in 1823 describes the party meeting up with an Aboriginal tribe in the Billilingra area. At first the tribe were frightened and disappeared but were later persuaded into conversation and told the explorers that the name of the rolling downs was 'Monaroo'. This is the first recording of the name Monaro, which over the years has been spelt in numerous different ways.

A number of reports by early settlers and travellers, such as John Lotsky, described encounters with Aborigines, their camps, behaviour, appearances, customs and ceremonies. The Monaro tribe managed to remain on reasonably friendly terms with the settlers. There were instances of disputes over ceremonial grounds and their disregard for ownership of stock but generally they acquiesced to the occupation of their land. In some instances they were employed on stations or as trackers but many preferred their own tribal life.

Similar to what occurred in the rest of the colony, the Ngarigo were weakened by exotic diseases and their association with the intruding settlers. John Lambie estimated in 1845 that the Aboriginal population on the entire Monaro, which probably included the south coast areas, to be about 1,382. Other records during the 1840s, and later, describe groups of about 500 being seen regularly. A census in 1856 showed that there were 166 Aboriginal people in the Cooma district[7] but by 1892 reports state that only two Aborigines were still living on the Monaro. They were probably Bony Jack and his son Biggenhook, the latter who died in Cooma during the early part of the 20th century.

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[4] Environment & Conservation (NSW), Dept. of, *The Aboriginal People of the Monaro* 2005 p3

[5] Ibid.

[6] Currie, Captain Mark John *Journal of an Excursion to the Southward of Lake George in New South Wales*

[7] Hancock WK *Discovering the Monaro* p112

Contrary to reports of the early 20th century that the Ngarigo tribe was extinct it is now believed that many moved out of the area, some down to the south coast where they integrated with the clans around Bega and Bermagui.

There are many sites throughout the Cooma-Monaro Shire where evidence of Aboriginal life can be found but the most tangible reminders of the Ngarigo are the place names which have continued to be used.

Original caption 'Australian Aborigine, Monaro District' c1890
Henry King 20th century photographer, State Library of Victoria

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4.0   European Arrival on the Monaro

Captain Mark Currie and Major John Ovens had already carried out several expeditions south from Sydney as had Charles Throsby. Aboriginal reports of a great river, the 'Morombidgee', had resulted in previous expeditions discovering Lake George and reaching the Queanbeyan River. Currie and Ovens met at Charles Throsby's farm Bong Bong, Moss Vale in May 1823 and it was from there that they set off, along with Throsby's overseer Joseph Wild and an Aborigine, to explore the country south of Lake George.

Wild had been in the employ of Throsby for some years and had shown himself to be a willing and able bushman with a knowledge and respect for the Aborigines and their way of life. Together Throsby and Wild had made several forays from Bong Bong to the previously unknown country south, the success of which had depended on their relationship with the local tribes who assisted them to find food and water. In 1820 Wild had continued heading south and in August he camped at Lake George where he recorded the first sighting of 'snowy' mountains, which are now believed to have been the Brindabellas.[8]

Currie's map[9] shows that on 28 May 1823 they were on the eastern side of Lake George and during the following days travelled south, west then south again to skirt around some rough ranges. Their map notes 'Fine Forest Country intersected by stony Ranges' which, as they travelled, altered to 'Country tolerably well watered, the hills stony & the Soil sometimes good'.

They were unable to follow the Murrumbidgee directly owing to rugged hills on both sides but continued to travel south a few kilometres east of the river. On 4 June they recorded:

> 'Passed through a chain of clear downs to some very extensive ones, where we met a tribe of natives, who fled at our approach … with the assistance of the domesticated native of our party … we learned that the clear country before us was called Monaroo, which they described as very extensive.'

The 'chain of clear downs' is believed to be the three consecutive open undulating plains of the Michelago, Colinton and Bredbo valleys.

Travelling south the next day through more open treeless valleys and climbing Billilingra (Cosgrove) Hill they saw the 'Extensive Downs clear of Timber'[10] called Monaro. On 6 June the party crossed what they presumed was the Murrumbidgee River but which is believed to have been the Numeralla River[11]. The explorers named the country Brisbane Downs after the current governor but fortunately the name disappeared in favour of the Aboriginal name.

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[8] Field, Barron *Geographical Memoirs of NSW*
[9] Ibid. Mark John Currie's map 1825 Fig.3
[10] Ibid.
[11] For many years it was claimed that they only got as far as the Bredbo River, although this seems unlikely taking into account other details of their journey.

They proceeded south for some miles, possibly into the vicinity of the Bunyan area, but owing to diminishing provisions they were forced to turn north the following day and head for home. Their route ran slightly east but parallel to their original track but then swung east to meet up with the South Fish River ultimately reaching Lake George quite close to where their explorations began.

The group was disappointed not to have ventured further south having sighted land which appeared eminently suitable for sheep and cattle grazing. But that didn't deter settlers looking for new lands and within a few years there were squatters and shepherds all over the Monaro.

The explorers' precise route is not identifiable but it is believed that some tracks already made by the Ngarigo could have assisted them in their expedition. The ancient topography of rugged ranges to east and west with rolling plains to the south generally indicated the most straightforward and easiest route. This was not the heroic adventure of some other Australian explorers but the discovery of such suitable grazing pastures had an important impact at a time when the known and legally available land was not adequate to be able to sustain the colony and allow it to develop.

Portion of Captain Currie's & Major Ovens's map showing their route south 1825[12]

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[12] Hancock WK *Discovering the Monaro* p4

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5.0 The Squatters 1827 – 1860

Monaro's early history is inexorably intertwined with the squatters and their search for new grazing lands. The process of white settlers moving onto the Monaro was only sporadically recorded as this was far beyond the Limits of Location and, as their activities were deemed to be illegal, many people were in fear of the law. By 1830 the boundaries of the Nineteen Counties, which were designed to enable some sort of orderly settlement with such things as police protection, roads and local justice, had been expanded south to Michelago.

Thus John Lhotsky's account, *Journey from Sydney to the Australian Alps* 1834, describing his travels to the Monaro is a valuable and rare account of those earliest squatting days. It is also surprising, taking into account the legal limitations, that within the short number of years between the first explorers and Lhotsky's expedition, squatters were scattered over what is now known as the Monaro and had claimed and occupied vast tracts of land. Throughout the journey, that is, until crossing the Snowy River, hardly a day went by without him coming across a settler, shepherd or stockman.

The Census of 1828[13] did list 20 people on the Monaro, although it has been shown that all were actually servants and were living about the Limestone Plains area (Canberra district). What is uncertain is whether these people were only based in Limestone Plains but actually working on the Monaro. According to a letter from Richard Brooks he had been at Gegedzerick (Jejezerick, Jijedery), near Berridale, with stock and men since 1827, although neither his name nor any of his employees' names appear on the Census.

When William Glanville came to the Monaro in 1832 to work for Joseph Ward at Wambrook he claimed that there was only one hut at Kuma (Cooma), belonging to Cooper and Levy, and that west of Cooma there were only three stations Coolringdon, Gegedzerick and Wambrook.[14]

According to John Lhotsky's 1834 account information which he gained from Mr Bath (manager of Kuma station) there were stations at Waterholes (north of Michelago) (R Campbell) 7 years; Kuma (Cooma) (Cooper & Levy) 5 years; Pindjera (Bunyan) (Dr Reid) 4/5 years; Jijedery (Gegedzerick) (R Brooks) 6 years; Yinibrothers (Sherwin) 2 years; Tomgrogin (Nimmitabel vicinity) (White) 4 years; Benilingra (Billilingera) (York) 5 years; Bulungewaing (west of Murrumbidgee, south of Bredbo) (Bradley) 2 years. There were as well a number of stations which had only been established for a few months and quite a few other stations south around the Snowy and McLaughlin Rivers[15]. These were the larger holdings but there were numerous other smaller holdings of which there is little record.

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[13] Andrews, Alan EJ *Earliest Monaro & Burragorang* p94
[14] Neal, Lauri *Cooma Country* p76
[15] Lhotsky, John *A Journey f rom Sydney to the Australian Alps 1834* p.105

Lhotsky's journey took him approximately along the same track as the explorers, a track that was being beaten to a road by hundreds of people flocking to the new found grazing lands. The places he visits are often easily identifiable on a modern map.

From Limestone Plains he crossed by George Canning's Pass, calling in at Mr Campbell's Waterholes, and travelled to Micaligo (Michelago) Plains. Arriving at Mr Keef's farm Lhotsky notes that it comprises 'level arable land and commanding an extensive cattle run on the Plains themselves'.[16]
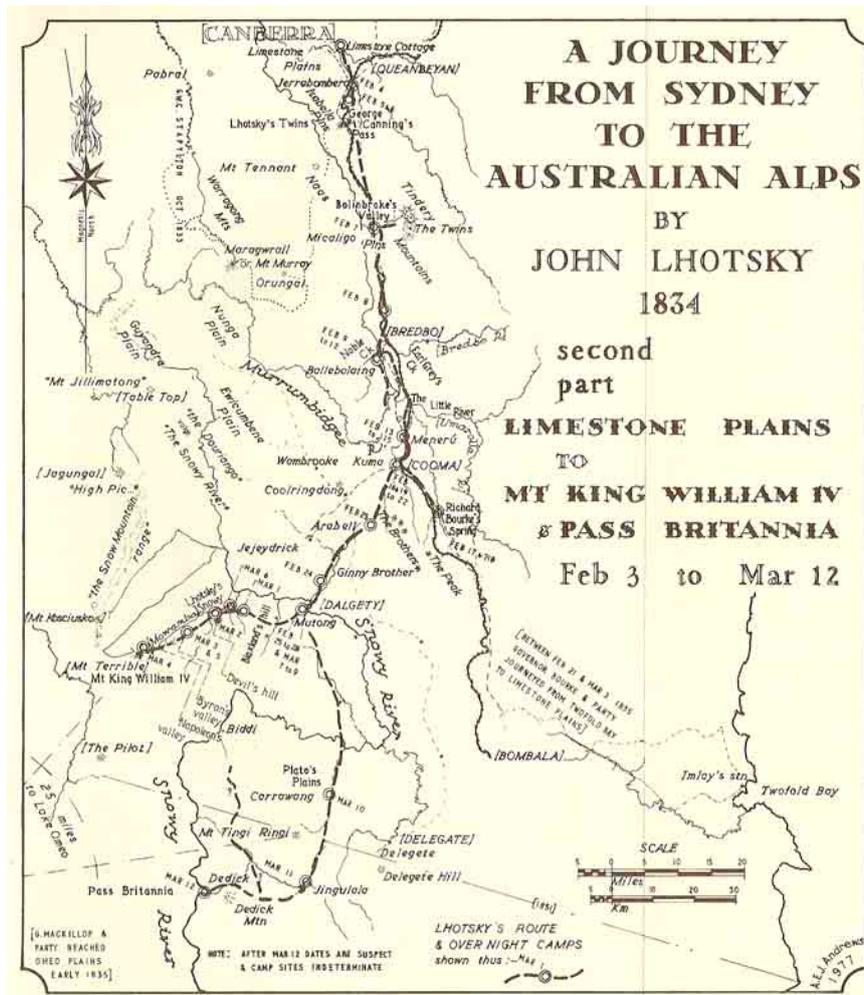
John Lhotsky's map 1834 showing the second stage of his journey[17]

The next station visited by Lhotsky was Mr Packer's station, located in the south east of the Michelago Plain where the party camped the night. The stay gave the group an opportunity to investigate their surroundings where at Michelago they came upon a 'sly grog shop' and were dismayed at the 'fighting and disorder'[18] as well as the number of illegal dealings that were being carried out. He remarks 'there was no perceptible tie or sway, connecting man and country with any authority whatever.'[19]

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[16] Ibid p.76
[17] Andrews, Alan EJ *Earliest Monaro & Burragorang*
[18] Lhotsky, John *A Journey from Sydney to the Australian Alps 1834* p.80
[19] Ibid p.79

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Lhotsky's description of the landscape included it was a remarkable and an inexplicable fact that the plains were 'altogether destitute of trees'[20]. His travels then took him to Mr Wylde's Jungelera Valley (Ingelara Creek), south to Gunguandra (Gungoandra Creek), past York's Billilingra station and onto William Bradley's Ballebalaing located on the western banks of the Murrumbidgee. He observes that at last he was on the 'Menero' Downs.

He lingered for four days at Ballenbalaing, leaving reluctantly and also commenting that while packing up there were so many other travellers he was continually interrupted. 'There is a greater traffic and motion on Menoro, than our Legislature may believe'[21]. At Bunyan he meets up with Dr Reid who suggests a visit to Mr Bath, manager of Kuma Station. The encounters with Reid and Bath and the subsequent inspection of the Rock Flat Spring provided Lhotsky with a lot of material for his journal but unfortunately at that date the manuscript ends abruptly and the balance appears to have been lost even though his expedition continued south.

During the 1830s and 1840s the quest for land continued. Men claimed vast areas as sheep and cattle runs simply by grazing their stock on the land. Disputes were frequent and as there was little security of tenure, squatters started demanding leases beyond the settled districts. The Squatting Act 1836 was put forward as a solution and squatters were required to pay an annual fee of 10 pounds. In 1837 Squatting Districts were created and John Lambie, as Commissioner for Maneroo, was chosen to collect the fees and ensure that the act was implemented. Between July and September of 1839 he travelled compiling a census of the stations' names, licensees and number of residents[22] mainly in the area now know as Cooma-Monaro Shire. Within the next 12 months he travelled further afield recording virtually all the stations in his vast territory.

The next year Stuart Ryrie was employed to conduct the first official survey of the Squatting District of Maneroo. His family held the leases for a number of large stations in NSW, including Coolringdon and Micalego where he based himself to conduct his tours. Ryrie's task was to 'provide plans, sketch views, compass bearings and celestial observations'[23]. Consequently his accurate observations provide important historical information at a time when little had been properly recorded.

In 1848 a list of applicants and their Monaro runs was published in the Government Gazette[24]. Some applicants applied for a number of runs comprising many thousands of acres. The largest application was from William Bradley being for some 100,000 acres (40,000 hectares) which included the runs of Dangelong, Cooma Creek, Myalla, Upper and Lower Rock Flat. Within a few years Bradley claimed even more land and his runs extended from Bredbo to within 13 kilometres of Bombala, including the former Ryrie station Coolringdon. Cleverly, Bradley had claimed much of the band of rich basalt land.

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[20] Ibid p.79
[21] Ibid p.97
[22] Andrews, Alan EJ *Earliest Monaro & Burragorang 1790 to 1840* pp124,125
[23] Ibid p140
[24] Mitchell, Felix *Back to Cooma* pp29,30

Without official surveys the property boundaries were described in the Gazette by reference to natural features such as hills, mountains, rocks, creeks and rivers as well as the adjoining runs. Disagreements were frequent and acrimonious.
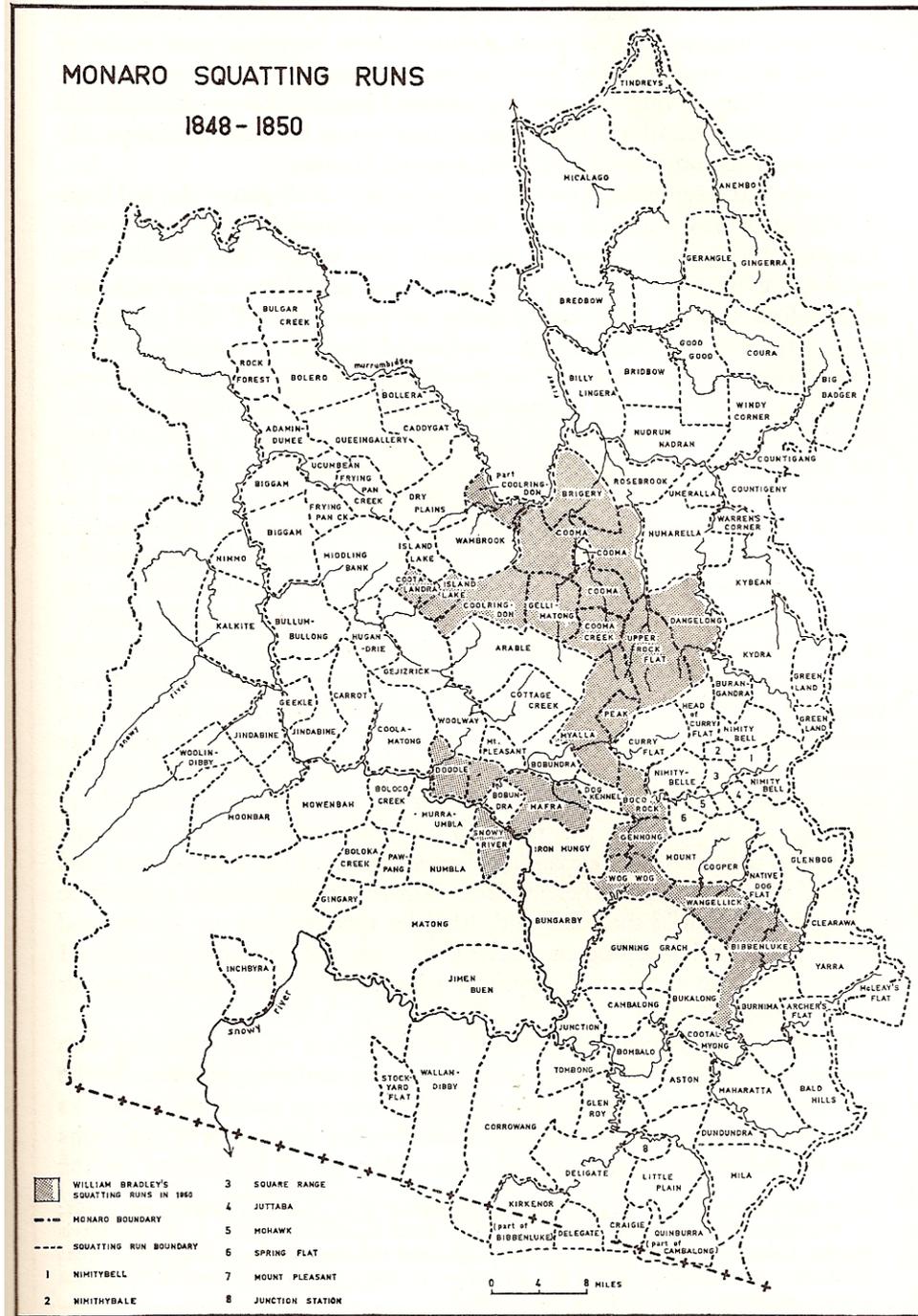
Monaro Squatting Runs 1848-1850[25]

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[25] Hancock WK *Discovering the Monaro* p47

6.0   Securing the Land

The Crown Lands Acts (The Robertson Land Acts) 1862 brought more certainty but increased complexity. The squatters, who initially had settled on Crown land without permission but later were required to enter into a lease and pay a licence fee, were given rights to $1/25^{th}$ of their stations and this often included areas with farm improvements such as fences, dams and sheds. New comers, known as selectors, could apply to purchase blocks between 40 and 320 acres (16 and 85 hectares), they had to live on the blocks for one year and carry out improvements.

Amongst the first selectors in January 1862 were William Keigh, Coolringdon, for land near Slacks Creek, Robert Mason for land on Gungoandra Creek, Charles Fergus, Wangrah, for land on Strike-a-Light Creek, Thomas Brogan, Billylingera, for land at Little Plain and James Litchfield, Mialla, for land on the Jillamatong Creek.

Expectedly squatters and selectors found loop holes in the new laws. Speculators bought up blocks with no intention of farming, rough huts were claimed to be permanent homes, squatters applied for blocks in the names of different family members often selecting all the available waterholes to keep out other graziers, agents were used as dummy selectors. Some even had moveable huts and fences, erected purely for the inspectors, which were relocated as necessary.

Another problem was the lack of surveyors. Free selection of land without official survey was allowed but resulted in bitter disputes, the same land was being claimed by the original squatters and the new selectors.

Despite this the list of stations in 1866 is surprisingly similar to that of 1848. Ownership had changed in a lot of cases but many of the same family names had retained the holdings. William Bradley by then had claimed 20 stations totaling some 300,000 acres (120,000 hectares) and in 1866 they were offered for sale. Hugh Wallace bought the three northern stations, Coolringdon, Dangelong and Myalla for his sons. The investment was unsuccessful, Dangelong became heavily indebted to George King & Company and foreclosure followed. Bradley died in 1868 and the balance of the properties was sold.

Dummying, as the practice was known, and selection by minors were prohibited by an amendment to the Act in 1875, which also doubled the maximum size of a block to 640 acres (256 hectares). James Litchfield, originally manager for Bradley at Myalla, had selected land on the Jillamatong Creek and he insisted that the blocks were far too small and that at least 2,560 acres (1,024 hectares) were required for a viable pastoral enterprise. Despite these curtailments selectors were still able to accumulate large parcels of land. For example James Litchfield and his family secured some 20,000 acres (8,000 hectares). Finally a further amendment in 1884 provided for a 'division of every pastoral lease into two zones, one for the lessee, the other for free selectors'[26].

For all the drawbacks of the Land Acts they did give squatters and selectors security that allowed them to build more permanent dwellings and farm buildings, undertake improvements to the land as well as fence areas.

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[26] Ibid p99

7.0   Establishment of Towns & Villages

Please refer to local histories included in the bibliography for more detailed information.

Sketch Plan Showing Cooma-Monaro Shire Towns, Villages & Rivers

Victoria Design & Management Pty Ltd

7.1   Bunyan

Bunyan, where Dr Reid had a station, was the first proper settlement on the Monaro. It was ideally located on the main track south and was initially called Reid's Flat. This then became Jew's Flat as a number of Jewish families established themselves there. A reference to 'Reid's Innkeeper in 1832 was William Stanton'[27] in Back to Cooma 1926 indicates that an inn was operating there at the time.

It was here that Abraham Moses established the Manaroo Stores in 1838 and the next year applied for permission to operate the Maneroo Inn. In 1841 the Squatters' Arms was built on a site directly opposite the original Maneroo Inn and beside the old store. The earliest licensee, Moses, was succeeded in a year by Solomon Solomon who had bought Moses out of his two businesses. For many years people from all over the Monaro travelled to Reid's Flat to purchase their supplies. Records show that Alexander Davidson was the licensee for the Squatter's Arms in 1855. Subsequently the inn became known as John Cullen's Hotel but the settlement never grew into a village and its place as a commercial centre for the Monaro was overtaken by the development of Cooma.

7.2   Cooma

John Lhotsky visited Kuma (Cooma) station in 1834 where he met up with the manager, Mr Bath. At the time the station was owned by Cooper & Levy, but was later taken over by James Kirwan. In 1842 John Lambie, appointed as the Crown Lands Commissioner for Maneroo in 1837, constructed a residence and office, at the south end of what became Lambie Street, as a base to carry out his duties. He claimed 1,280 acres (512 hectares), known as Mr Lambie's Paddock, which had been part of James Kirwan's Kuma run.

Kirwan then opened an inn at the junction of Cooma and Back Creeks, in the vicinity of the first Kuma hut. Built of rubble stone it was on the main road that came from the north and led to Coolringdon and Kiandra. Lambie's place was only some hundreds of metres away.

When Surveyor Townsend produced his Plan for the Village of Cooma in 1849 there were two main groups of buildings. One John Lambie's, comprising a house, office and lock-up, the other Kirwan's consisting of the inn, a stone store, a blacksmith's shop, a school, stable, wool store and stockyards. Between the two settlements were two constables' huts on what was to become Lambie Street.

The new plan showed a subdivision on the western side of the road that led between Kirwan's and Lambie's premises and a larger subdivision north over the hill along today's Sharp Street. In the next year blocks were being sold.

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[27] Mitchell, Felix *Back to Cooma 1926* p37
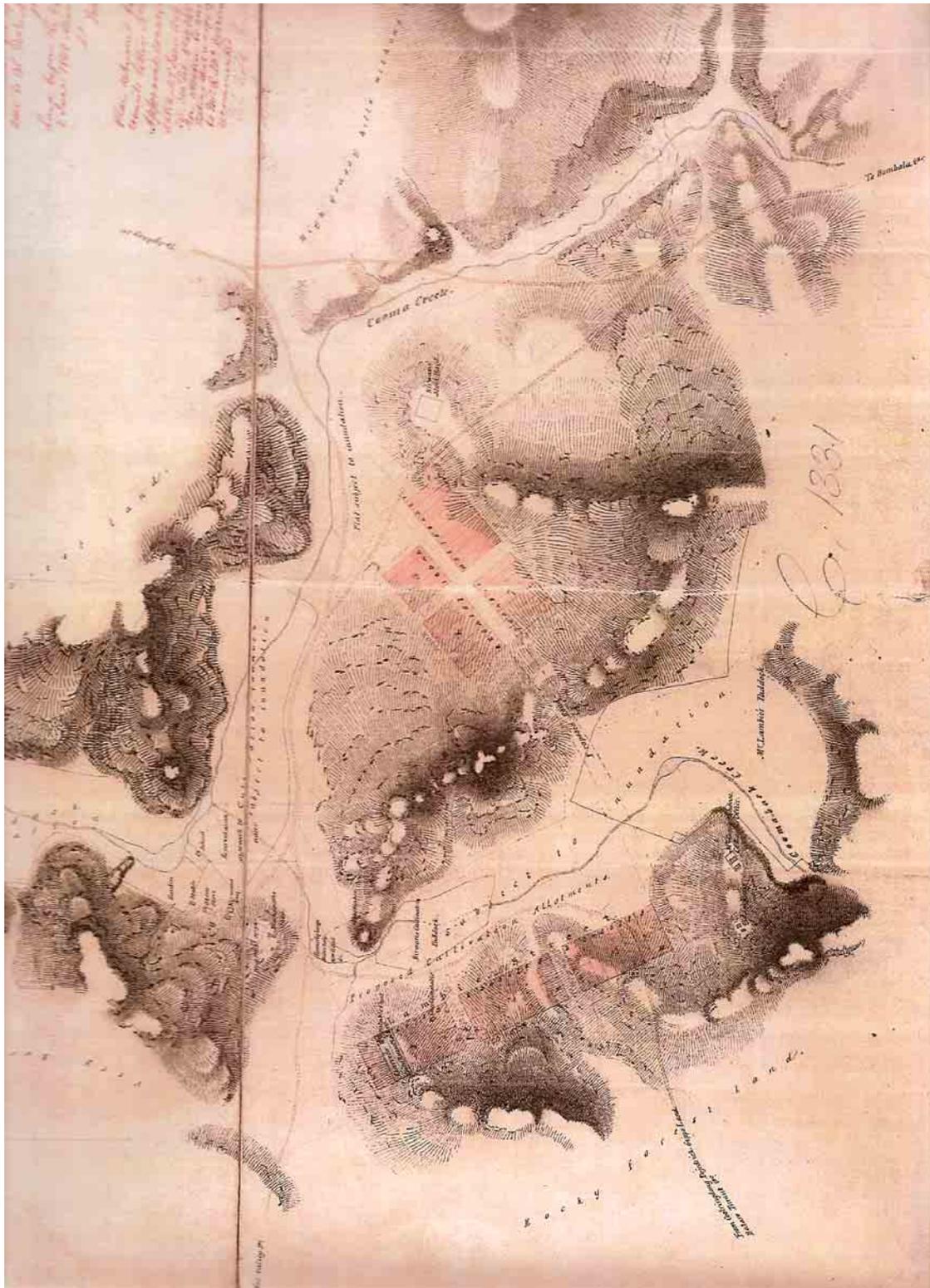
Portion of Thomas Townsend's 1849
Plan of the Village of Cooma
State Archives NSW
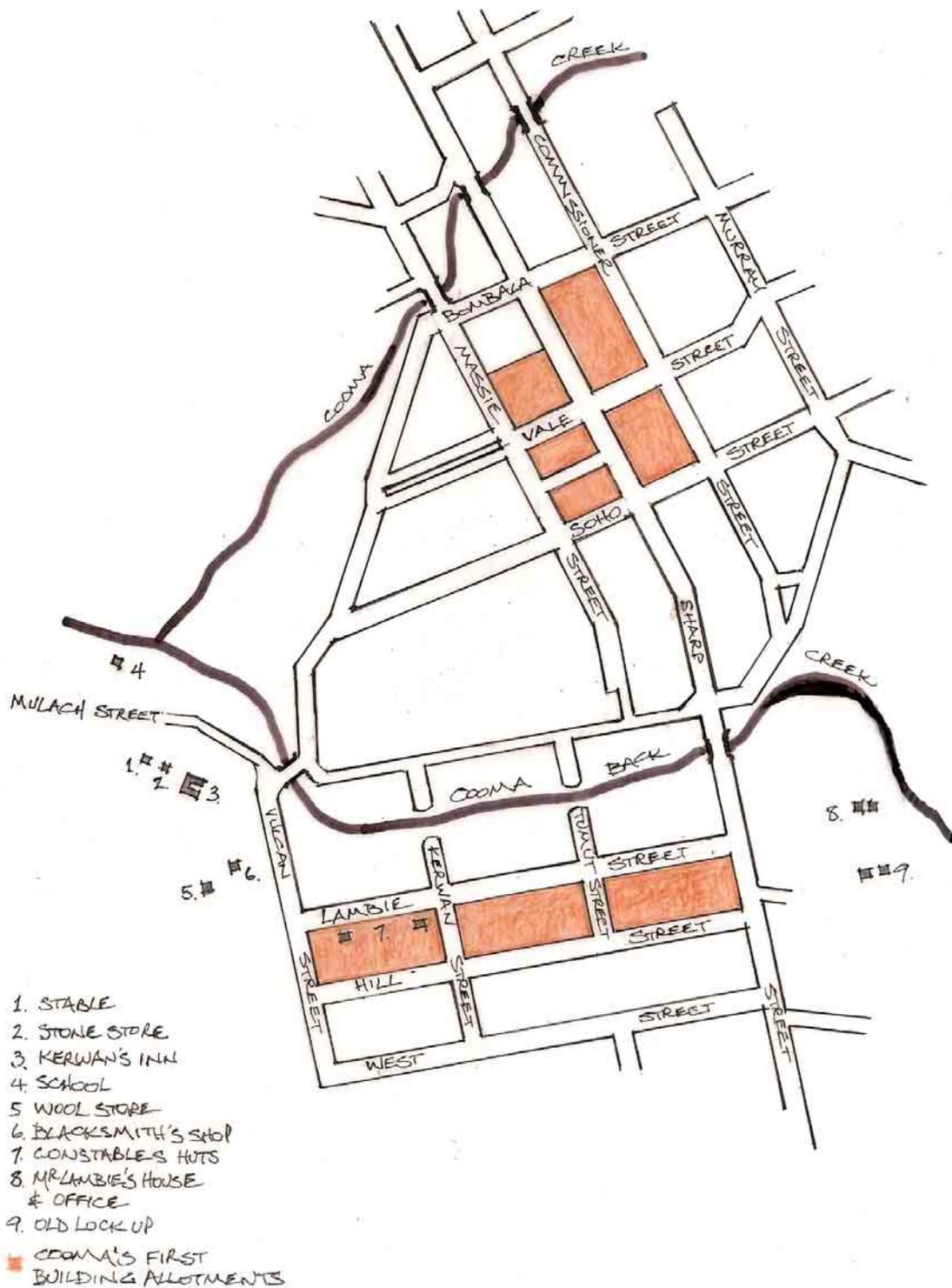
Sketch Plan Showing Location of Existing Buildings
and Original Building Allotments as per Townsend's plan 1849

The map contains the following labels and legend:

CREEK
COMMISSIONER STREET
MURRAI STREET
BOMBALA
MASSIE
VALE
SOHO STREET
COOMA
STREET
SHARP
CREEK
MULACH STREET
COOMA BACK
STREET
VULCAN STREET
KERWAN STREET
LAMBIE
HILL
TUKUT STREET
STREET
WEST
STREET
STREET

1. STABLE
2. STONE STORE
3. KERWAN'S INN
4. SCHOOL
5. WOOL STORE
6. BLACKSMITH'S SHOP
7. CONSTABLES HUTS
8. MR LAMBIE'S HOUSE & OFFICE
9. OLD LOCK UP

COOMA'S FIRST BUILDING ALLOTMENTS

Settlement gradually increased in Lambie Street and slowly moved over the hill along Sharp Street and down around what is now Centennial Park. Several more slab and bark stores were built there and another hotel, called the Graziers Inn. The discovery of gold at Kiandra in 1859 boosted development and quickly a number of new buildings were erected. The decline of the goldfields within a few years resulted in an influx of people looking for work and many families ended up remaining in Cooma and the district.

The prosperity of the second half of the 19th century ensured Cooma's place as the commercial centre for the Monaro. Numerous substantial public buildings were erected, large hotels were built, banks opened their doors, two newspapers were published, the railway arrived in 1888, a range of shops were established and businesses which serviced and supported the rural economy were developed.

Until the end of World War II Cooma was a typical example of a fairly prosperous rural town dependent on the vicissitudes of the sheep and cattle markets which fluctuated according to economic forces and the weather.

The selection of Cooma as the headquarters for the Snowy Scheme had an impact on nearly every aspect of the town. The expanding population required more houses, schools, offices, public transport, more shops with a wider range of merchandise, more doctors were needed. Families, with their different traditions and languages, had come from all over the world and in many cases from places affected by World War II. The Scheme brought prosperity to the town and the region generally with the demand for services and goods. It confirmed Cooma as the commercial centre of the Monaro.

Cooma c1890 – Montague's Flour Mill centre right
Cooma Monaro Historical Society

7.3   Bredbo

Settlers took up land around the Bradbow (Bredbo) River from 1836 but there wasn't a sufficient population to warrant a post office until 1874. In the meantime the Bredbo Hotel was built in 1850 for travellers who passed along the road and crossed the river at that point. A camp for railway workers was established there in 1889 when the railway reached the village and then continued on to Cooma. This stimulated the local economy as did the mining activities in the ranges to the east that were carried on sporadically throughout the late 19th and early 20th century. But Bredbo was too close to Cooma to rival it as a centre.

7.4   Michelago

The Michelago Plains or Valley were mentioned in the earliest documents of people travelling to the Monaro and at one stage it was on the border of the outer limits of the Nineteen Counties. John Lhotsky recorded a sly grog shop there in 1834 and a hotel, the Union, was operating at Keefe's Plain (Michelago) in 1838. Being on the obvious direct route south between Queanbeyan and Reid's Flat, the location was destined to become at least a village.

A post office was opened in 1860 and about the same time a police station. The residents were relieved to see the completion of a watch-house the next year following attacks by bushrangers. The railway arrived at Michelago in 1887 and a small station was built. This encouraged growth and the centre of the village shifted from around the original lock-up, now on the Monaro Highway near Soglio, to closer to the station. In 1901 it was considered to be a town however proximity to Queanbeyan and the increased ease of transport resulted in Michelago remaining a small village.

7.5   Nimmitabel

Nimmitabel was settled around the late 1830s. Farquar McKenzie describes in his journal of 1837[28] how he camped in a small valley and the next day went to Nimithybelle (Nimmitabel) to procure bark and planks for a hut. The village flourished being located at the junction of roads leading east to the coast, south to Bombala and north to Cooma.

During the 1840s John (also known as William) Stanton opened the first hotel in the village, the Nimmitable Inn, after being an innkeeper at Reid's Flat in the 1830s. The earliest headstones in the cemetery are dated 1844. In 1858 a survey officially declared Nimitybelle a town and during the 1860s it flourished with two stores, a stone courthouse, several hotels and a stone church. At that time John Geldmacher built the large stone mill which, although it operated as a flour mill only for a short time, has now become the town's icon. In his will Geldmacher left the mill and several other buildings to the community for their benefit.

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[28] McKenzie, Farquar *Voyage from England to New South Wales*

As the 19th century progressed into the early 20th century the number of buildings increased and the railway was extended from Cooma to Bombala with a station at Nimmitabel. It was at this time that the name was officially changed from Nimitybelle to Nimmitabel.

In 1948 a timber mill was established employing many of the local people and even though there were changes of ownership it continued to operate until 1992.

The Old Windmill Nimitybelle
Charles Kerry – Power House Museum

7.6   Jerangle

The road, which runs between Cooma and Captain's Flat, passes through rugged, rocky country which opens out to fertile grazing lands around Jerangle and Jingera. The area was known to be a haven for bushrangers and cattle rustlers, bounded between the Tinderry and Gourock Ranges with rough roads north to Captain's Flat, west to Bredbo or south to Numeralla. A number of scattered settlements developed during the 19th century, some becoming villages with police stations and stores and others being just a single schoolhouse.

Jerangle was a small but thriving community during the early 1900s. Apart from a stone church and inn there was a police station and tracker's hut and during the peak periods of activity of mining at Cowra Creek, Fiery Creek and Macannally a general store operated.

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7.7   Numeralla

Numeralla, sited at the confluence of the Numeralla and Badja Rivers, developed into a village being the most convenient crossing point. Settlers came to the district in the 1840s and discovery of gold in 1858 along the Big Badja River brought a wave of prospectors. 1863 a post office was established in the village and as the century progressed the population expanded and the number of buildings in the village increased.

The rich river flats were found to be suitable to grow potatoes and for a number of years Numeralla potatoes were supplied to the Monaro and Canberra markets. The local economy was also positively affected by the mining activities at Cowra Creek, Fiery Creek and Macanally which bought a certain amount of prosperity to the families of the district.

7.8   Shannons Flat & Yaouk

Shannons Flat and Yaouk areas were initially isolated from the settlement which came through Bredbo and Bunyan and moved further south. Squatters to Yaouk were more likely to come by crossing the Murrumbidgee near Bredbo and travel through rough country before getting to open plains. The Statistical Returns of 1831 listed J Slake (probably Blake) as holding the Yayak (Yaouk) station[29] and the Brayshaws settled in the Bobeyan Valley during the 1840s. Archibald Crawford bought the Yaouk run in partnership with Lachlan Cochrane, but Crawford had to retire from the partnership in 1864. The property is still owned by the Cochrane family.

The district relied on the town of Adaminaby, in the Snowy River Shire, for supplies and services. Shannons Flat never grew into a village but had a school from 1906 and a community hall was built 1946 on land donated by the Luton family. The school operated until 1970 and a few years later the building was transferred to Peak View.

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[29] Neal, Laurie *Cooma Country* p15

8.0   The Monaro Develops

8.1   Pastoralism & Agriculture

The first settlers came to the Monaro with flocks of sheep and herds of cattle. Often the stock did not belong to them but to wealthy landowners with established farms closer to Sydney. The shepherds and stockmen sought out new grazing lands and looked after their animals as best they could. The Monaro, considered to be well watered and without the need for clearing, was an ideal option for grazing. On the other hand the climate was harsh, extremely cold in winter and the plains a long way from normal civilization.

The first stock enclosures were wooden hurdles where shepherds drove the animals for protection at night. On some stations more permanent stone walled yards were built. After gold petered out at Kiandra, in the mid 1860s, Chinese miners came to the area and built yards and long stone walls across the countryside on properties where stone was abundantly scattered about. Today there are still some of these stone walls in the Zelka Heights area of Cooma. On some stations series of stone enclosures, such as the ones still extant at Nitholm off the Carlaminda Road, were erected so that the stock were able to range further during the day.

Following improved land tenure with the Land Acts and the availability of wire fencing material boundary fences started to be erected in the mid 1870s. From then on paddock fences were increasingly built to be able to further control stock movements and grazing. The shepherding system, although ancient, had proven to be unreliable often owing to the lack of experience and commitment among the people employed to do the job. Fencing allowed the stock to be better looked after and they no longer needed to be watched during the day and herded into yards at night.

Animals continued to graze on native pastures and breeding was uncontrolled, leading to reports of in-breeding and weakened sheep and cattle. James Litchfield was the first to breed sheep specifically suitable for the Monaro and by the 1880s many graziers were improving their flocks and herds, learning from their own experiences and their neighbours.

The droughts of the late 1880s showed how Monaro's economic base was virtually dependent on wool and meat and very vulnerable to bad times and downturns in markets. The district did not escape the severe droughts of the late 1890s and similar to the rest of the colony was badly affected by the depression of those years.

At the same time rabbit numbers increased to plague proportions and were said to be swarming all over the Monaro. Landholders tried many methods to eradicate them including dismantling the old stone walls and sheep shelters of the 1860s where rabbits were able to harbour.

Cattle were depastured at Kiandra in 1839 but did not survive the winter being trapped in snow. The practice of transhumance, taking stock up to the high country for summer grazing, started when land legislation of the 1860s restricted many selectors to small holdings. This coupled with some drought years resulted in a search for summer pastures above the tree line.

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Grazing in the Snowy Mountains became sought after because not only did it give the home paddocks time to regenerate but it also moved sheep away from the seeding corkscrew grass which had spread over large areas. The other benefit to graziers was that there was an ability to increase overall carrying capacity.

For decades the graziers had not paid to use the pastures but when snow leases were introduced in 1890 there seemed little demand for them. The resistance was based on the premise that if no-one took up the leases then the land would remain freely available. Efforts were made to make leases more attractive and the 1917 Act extended the terms of the snow lease to 14 years. Finally there was some interest.

Even though grazing is no longer permitted in the Kosciuszko National Park, taking stock up to the high country for summer grazing on crown leases has become a Monaro tradition. The opportunity for extra pasture is relied on for a viable pastoral enterprise by many landholders and the huts, stock routes and yards are evidence that the practice has changed very little over 140 years.

Another practice which has been intrinsic to the development of the Monaro is shearing. Initially shearing took place outside, the sheep having previously been washed and allowed to dry. The washing process required the animals to be herded through a sufficiently deep waterhole and each one was rubbed clean. The sheep had to be completely dry when shorn because wet wool self-combusts. The wool was then baled and stored in a wool shed until being sent to market.

Loading Wool Micalago – Charles Kerry
National Library Australia

Around the 1870s the practice altered, not only was the preliminary washing found to be unnecessary but shearing in a shed meant less dependence on weather. This was the beginning of building shearing sheds and yards with elaborate plans that facilitated the movement of stock through the process.

Some sheds grew out of the old wool shed while others were specifically designed with sheep shelter below, chutes, runs, races and pens and areas for shearing, wool classing, pressing and storage. Associated with the shearing sheds were shearers' quarters with kitchens and dining areas in separate buildings.

For a number of years during the 1870s and 80s some good crops of wheat were grown on the Monaro and the grain sent by bullock wagon to other markets. The method of transport was slow and costly and the wheat growers were amongst the petitioners for a railway station at Cooma. However the arrival of the railway had a reverse effect allowing grain to be delivered to the area cheaper than it could be produced and transported elsewhere. Also the climate wasn't conducive to wheat growing with late and early frosts and unreliable rainfall. Other crops suffered the same fate although lucerne was successfully grown for many years at Rosebrook, Bunyan, Bredbo Station and Dromore.

Bagging Wheat on the Monaro
Cooma-Monaro Historical Society

In the late 19th century the dairying industry developed, butter factories were built at Numeralla and Nimmitabel and butter production became a significant commodity on the Monaro. But the producers were competing with farmers on the south coast where dairying was better suited. So Monaro farmers returned to their original economic mainstays of wool and meat production.

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8.3   Builders & Building Materials

Some builders' names reappear in old Monaro records over several decades. One team Mawson Potter & Scarlett came to Cooma in the early 1860s from the Kiandra goldfields. Their first contract was to plaster the Royal Hotel and they quickly became known for quality stonemasonry. In Greville's Post Office Directory 1872[30] JJ Mawson's occupation was noted as builder, Charles Potter's as mason and David Scarlett's as plasterer even though they were all known to carry out plastering as well as masonry.

Mawson, Potter and Scarlett erected many Cooma buildings, including Cooma Hospital and St Paul's, until they parted company around 1870. Scarlett then moved over to the Berridale area and continued the Monaro tradition of building in stone while Mawson went to Bolocco returning to Cooma in 1877 where he established a successful and long standing building business which his sons continued.

Another builder, John Malcolm won several government contracts to build police stations, courthouses and gaols in Nimmitabel and Cooma in the early 1860s. Reports of the work on the Cooma buildings were that it was unsatisfactory and that within 18 months some parts were already falling down. These buildings followed designs from the offices of James Barnet, Colonial Architect, which were also used for Cooma's courthouse and post office.

Other builders of notable public and ecclesiastical buildings were John Harris, Cooma Post Office; Roddan, Cooma convent; Richard Hannaford, St Patrick's; Mawson, Potter & Scarlett, St Paul's; Setchell & Roddan, Cooma gaol; P Poidevin and D O'Rourke, police barracks and John Main, Cooma courthouse.

Churches on the Monaro generally were designed by architects or architectural firms from Sydney who were experienced working on ecclesiastical buildings. The first architect to work in the district was GD Cochran who came to Cooma in 1891 to supervise the building of St Paul's spire, designed by Harry C Kent. Cochran stayed on in the district and was instrumental in creating some of the area's finer homesteads and other buildings including St Paul's rectory and St Patrick's primary school.

In Greville's Cooma Post Office Directory 1872 there were 13 masons listed indicating the significance of the trade for the developing district. Important public buildings erected in Cooma in the 19th century were usually of granitic gneiss, a type of granite which could be easily worked into regular smooth blocks for ashlar masonry. For buildings in Cooma stone, particularly granitic gneiss, was often quarried directly from the building site as in the case of the Roman Catholic buildings and the gaol.

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[30] *Greville's Post Office Directory 1872* Cooma www.monaropioneers.com

A number of quality building stones have been identified throughout the Shire such as red granite at Cooma, Jerangle, Maffra and Michelago, grey granite at Bredbo, Jerangle and Cooma, porphyry at Bredbo and Michelago, diorite at Jerangle and Maffra, granitic gneiss at Cooma, marble at Cooma and Michelago, slate at Cooma and basalt between Cooma and Nimmitabel. The different types of granite and basalt were extensively used in the Shire during the 19th and early 20th centuries to construct a wide range of buildings including many farm buildings.

At first the development of Cooma was measured by the number and standard of its hotels but later in the 19th century it was the number and standard of the public buildings and churches which visitors found impressive. At the time substantial stone buildings included three churches, a convent, a presbytery, courthouse, police station, gaol, post office, a number of hotels, a hospital, a school of arts as well as several large houses. Numerous smaller stone buildings such as shops, houses and stables contributed the inventory of granite and granitic gneiss structures. Together all these buildings imparted an air of solidity and respectability to the town which according to some visitors seemed at odds with some of the other activities and businesses being undertaken.[31]

During the 1870s bricks became more widely available when transportable brick making plants were introduced and were able to be moved from site to site. In 1877 JJ Mawson built a pugmill for brickmaker Willis at the end of Mulach Street, Cooma and Willis had a large slab shed for brick drying in Tumut Street, Cooma.

In the 1880s JJ Mawson and Joseph Hain started up separate brick making works in Cooma near Tumut Street. Generally the bricks were for their own constructions and Mawson's were notable for not having a frog and being larger than the standard size. The Stafford family of Kalaru made bricks near Christ Church during the 1890s.

Lime, an essential ingredient for mortar was burnt at a number of locations including Numeralla. A limestone reef runs north south from Canberra to Numeralla. George Stopp had a lime burning plant on the Bulong property, Mittagang Road, Cooma. He supplied lime for Cooma gaol when it was being built and evidence of the process survives at the site as well as a stone lime burner's hut.

Good timber for building was plentiful throughout many areas of the Monaro. In the 1860s James and Fred Broadhead built a pit saw at Kalkite, in the Snowy River Shire, and worked the mountain ash felled in the area. Some of their first big contracts were to supply timber to build Cooma Hospital in 1867, Hain & Co. with hardwood to sell and in 1872 timber to erect St Paul's church, Cooma. Over the years problems and costs of cartage increased and in 1906 the Broadheads moved the operation to Countegany which was much closer to Cooma and gave access to a new timber supply, messmate. The Broadhead mill became well known particularly for supplying timber for tennis racquets.

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[31] Neal, Laurie *Cooma Country* p200
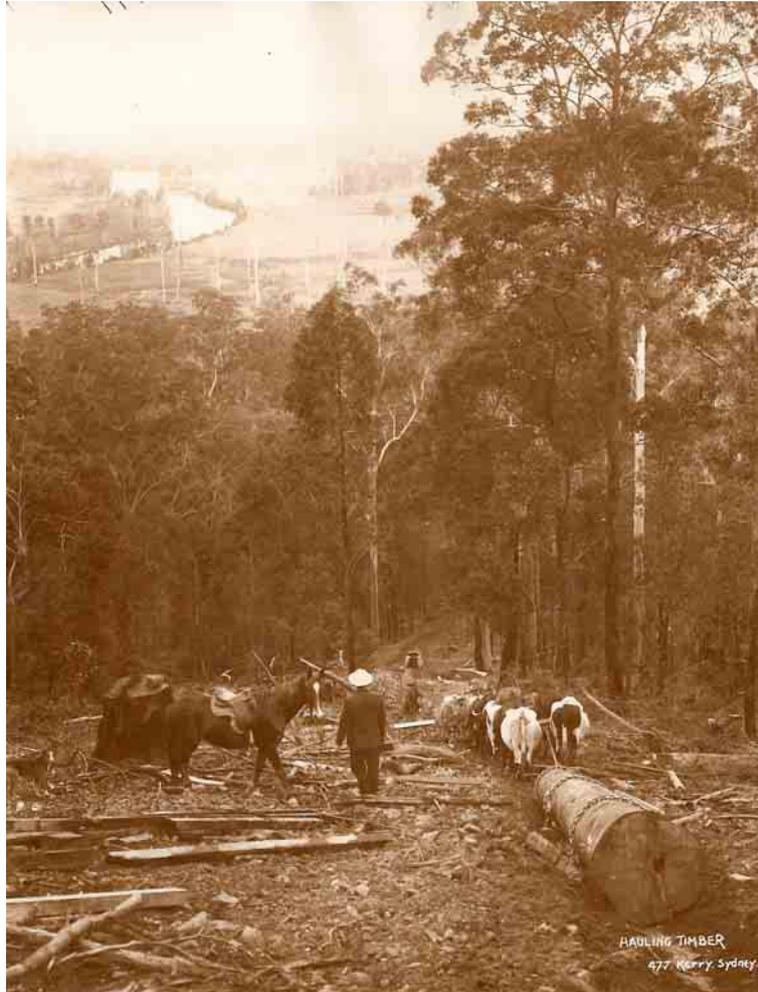
Hauling Timber – possibly in the Numeralla district
This photo was used on the front cover of Bert Broadhead's *100 Years of Timber*
Charles Kerry – Cooma Monaro Historical Society

John Geldmacher's failed flourmill at Nimmitabel was converted to a horse-powered timber mill and operated for a number of years. In 1921 George Rayner established a timber mill on Brown Mountain and after a fire moved it to Nimmitabel. This mill operated until near the end of the 20th century and supplied the local market as well as timber for some of the first houses built in Canberra.

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8.4 Industry & Commerce

During the first decades of settlement it was necessary for every squatter to have a field of wheat to enable his family and employees to make their own bread. This proved quite difficult on the Monaro because late frosts could ruin a wheat crop and thereby destroy the possibility of adequate flour for the next year. Graziers who owned areas not so susceptible to frosts started to produce wheat commercially and a number of flour mills were established, the first in Cooma being Alexander Montague's on Cooma Creek.

Ironically the most famous mill was Geldmacher's at Nimmitabel which was to be driven by blades, similar to a windmill. However the mill was deemed a safety hazard which might frighten horses and had to be converted to horsepower. After a period of producing some flour it was again converted, this time to a timber mill.

On the other hand, Mawson's flourmill on the Murrumbidgee River operated successfully from 1873 for some 30 years. The mill was run by water flowing through a 100 yard long tunnel and two 50 yard long channels and in 1897 could produce flour at the rate of '300lb to 400lb per hour'[32].

The earliest Monaro settlers had to be virtually self-sufficient and make do with what they could produce themselves. When the Monaroo Stores were opened at Reid's Flat (Bunyan) during the 1830s people travelled from all over the district to get supplies there even though the trips could mean they were away from home for days or even weeks.

Later during the 1840s James Kirwan established a store attached to his inn near Cooma Back Creek. Cooma's second store, a slab and bark structure, was opened by Alexander Montague in 1850/51 on a site fronting Massie Street and a few years later a similar slab store was opened in Cooma by Samuel Shannon. As the decade progressed more stores were built in Cooma. When Charles Solomon returned from the Kiandra goldfields he established a general store in Cooma and about the same time the Hain family opened several stores as well. Both the families of Solomon and Hain continued to operate stores in the town for the next 130 years.

According to records the earliest banking transactions occurred in the 1830s at Driscoll's Flat near Chakola where Daniel Driscoll conducted an agency for the Commercial Banking Company (CBC) of Sydney. In 1860 the CBC heard that another banking company was planning to open a branch in Cooma owing to the amount of cash and gold resulting from the Kiandra gold rush. TA Dibbs was dispatched urgently from Sydney and established a branch in a room of the Lord Raglan Inn.

At the same time the Bank of NSW had opened a branch at Kiandra but closed down within a year, not to operate on the Monaro until a branch was opened in Cooma in 1874. Eventually other banks decided that the district was adequately developed to open branches, the Australian Bank of Commerce in 1883 and the Government Savings Bank of NSW in 1914.

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[32] *Sydney Mail* 1897

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8.5 Mining

Following the discovery of gold at Kiandra in June 1859 hopeful prospectors flocked to the fields travelling from Victoria, Twofold Bay or by the Cooma Adaminaby road. But two severe winters and a decline in rich finds resulted in an exodus from the goldfields, many heading towards Cooma to find employment. The enormous number of people swelled the local population, brought new tradesmen to the area and stimulated the economy.

Discovery of gold in 1858 at the Big Badja Gold diggings, north of Numeralla, was the first large scale mining on the Monaro. Finds were sporadic but good quality. Lack of available water was a problem so a network of water races was built. In 1868 the fields were being work by Chinese who had left Kiandra but by 1871 the gold seemed to be mined out and everyone had left. Mining resumed in 1892 and the old water races of the 1860s were rebuilt. This lasted until 1897.

Closer to Cooma at Bushy Hill gold was found in 1897 and for the next year there was a frenzy of activity with some good yields. Advice was that it was a difficult area to mine, especially for a lone miner and that the patches of gold were quite scattered. Fewer claims were worked and by 1907 everything went quiet. Interest was briefly rekindled in 1927 but faded to nothing by 1929.

In the latter part of the 19th century there were successful gold diggings at Colyers Creek, Ingelara Creek, Kydra and Michelago Creek. Each of these areas had some promising finds but had the same problems – the ore was difficult to extract, control of and lack of water and it was hard to find companies prepared to invest in infrastructure. Chinese miners from Kiandra worked the claims but by the end of the 19th century mining had ceased.

In the rugged ranges east of Bredbo gold was found at Cowra Creek, Fiery Creek and Macanally and these areas were worked between 1888 and 1910, 1935 to 1947 and were then reopened in the 1970s. There were 12 different sites in 5 major areas[33] and there still is a lot of evidence of the mine workings as well as relics of human habitation. Remains of a hotel, bakery, numerous chimneys, schools, huts and other buildings are still extant.

These were the most developed mining sites on the Monaro with processing facilities and viable communities that declined then disappeared when profitability decreased. The reworking in the 1970s destroyed some of the older sites but they still do provide 'a unique picture of technology, living and working conditions of isolated bush mining communities'[34].

During the last years of the 19th century copper and silver mines were established at Dartmoor and Middle Flat, on the Carlaminda Road. Success was limited and by 1900 operations had ceased and the mines were closed down.

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[33] McGowan, Barry *Lost Mines Revisited* p28
[34] Ibid.p57

9.0   Rural Life

9.1   Accommodation

The first settlers on the Monaro were obliged to sort out their own accommodation. Some continued to live in tents, those who had the ability built bark huts, others ended up sheltering under rocks. The squatters, in whose name the land was claimed, usually were living comfortably closer to Sydney while their employees and convicts were sent to look after the stock. John Lhotsky visited a number of dwellings during his journey south in 1834 and when he came upon Dr Reid's tent at Bunyan he provided the following description.

> 'Dr Reid's tent presented a thorough Colonial appearance, being about 15 feet long and supported by strong poles, where tea chests and rum casks served as tables and chairs.'[35]

The next day he visits Kuma hut[36]:

> 'Such huts are built of stringy or iron bark trees, the stems of which being straight, require little shaping or adjusting. The bark of both these trees being besides separable from the stem easily and in long sheets, is one of our principal materials of our forest architectures, as the latter is equally used by our natives. Such sheets are nailed on the uprights, and form the walls, and of the same materials is the roof, all of which produce a rather sylvan appearance. Such huts are composed firstly of the main room, in which a large fireplace is always fed with the robust branches of the adjacent forest. About this place pieces of salted meat are hanging, ready …to glide into the equally large kettle, which is constantly boiling or simmering. Next to the fire-place is the table, and a place like an arm-chair, the exclusive lounge of the overseer or stockman, which of course is always ceded to the honoured guest. One of the sides of this room opens into another place, where the beds of the men, also made on the long sheets of bark, are visible. This place sometimes serves as a store for cask of beef, flour etc, and above this is a loft, where other articles are deposited.'

Slab huts supplanted bark huts when the settlers were adequately established to be able to spend time creating a better living environment. The progression from slab and bark huts to stone cottages was slow. The widespread resistance to building anything substantial on the stations was often owing to the lack of security of tenure.

As the Monaro offered a generous supply of good building stone, such as granite and basalt, stone was chosen to replace the less reliable and less weather proof slab and bark. At first chimneys were built of stone while the huts were still slab. The earliest stone cottages were based on the same single cell principle as the slab and bark huts, that is, one large room with fireplace and one smaller room as a bedroom and store, just as Lhotsky had described in 1834. The chimneys were large, solid and squat and often contained a baking oven as well as an open cooking fireplace. Verandahs were virtually unknown.

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[35] Lhotsky, J *A Journey from Sydney to the Australian Alps 1834* p164
[36] Ibid.

Typical early Monaro slab cottage with massive stone chimney
National Library of Australia

There was always a risk of fire and this resulted in the practice of separating the kitchen from the dwelling areas. Often the first two room cottage became the kitchen with the living/dining room and bedrooms being built some metres away in a separate building. This second building usually had a verandah at the front and a skillion section at the rear which served as bedrooms for children. Families were large, their houses small and many children shared the one bedroom. Sometimes these two small buildings developed in gradual stages into substantial homesteads with wings going off in all directions. Two storey homesteads were rare on the Monaro.

Dangelong homestead illustrates the evolution of a small cottage into a substantial homestead comprising five separate buildings linked over the years. The smaller building at the rear is the original two room cottage which became the separate kitchen block - National Library of Australia

Shingles started to take the place of thatch or bark for roofs. In the late 1850s some buildings had iron tile roofs. The first iron roof on the Monaro was installed when the Lord Raglan Inn[37] was erected in 1855 and 'in Cooma in 1856 there were three houses made of brick or stone, 123 houses of weatherboard or slab; two houses had shingled roofs, one had an iron roof, the rest had thatch or bark roofs.'[38]

Galvanised corrugated iron was available during the 1870s and became the material of choice for roofing. At the same time bricks were more easily obtainable either being manufactured on site or coming from the several brick works established in Cooma. By the end of the 19th century bricks were preferred for some of the more substantial Monaro buildings.

Weatherboards were popular for small cottages and then for larger houses in the beginning of the 20th century. Farm buildings continued to be a conglomeration of slabs, stone, corrugated iron and sometimes bricks were used for stables. These complexes represented all eras. Town buildings were usually constructed according to the financial budget of the owner and with what was available at the time.

In the area around Numeralla pise buildings were prevalent, probably because there was little good building stone available and transporting stone long distances wasn't economically feasible.

In Cooma there are a number of substantial buildings indicating strong growth during the Inter War period but it was in the 1950s with the commencement of the Snowy Scheme that building methods, materials and designs really changed. The influx of people required quickly and cheaply built accommodation and a number of companies were contracted to build a range of house models to suit different circumstances and family sizes. The houses were generally modest weatherboard buildings typical of the post war era when austerity measures where still having an impact.

The size of the Snowy work force steadily increased and the ability to provide new houses for men and their families could not be sustained. Every house in Cooma was full and, in some instances, three families lived in old two-bedroom cottages sharing a communal kitchen set up in a garage.

To save time the Snowy Mountains Authority established a factory to produce pre-fabricated houses which were transported to sites in two halves. Contracts were let to other companies to also supply houses. Of the 880 houses built for the Scheme 686 were erected in Cooma North and Cooma East. The Authority also built a small group of shops, an administrative centre, engineering laboratories and barracks in the new subdivisions.

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[37] The roof was replaced with Morewood & Rogers iron tiles imported from England in 1976
[38] Neal, Laurie *Cooma Country* p42

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9.2   Religion

When John Lhotsky travelled to the Monaro in 1834 he was dismayed to find 'no church south of Sutton Forest'[39]. This meant no one to conduct marriages, baptisms or funerals until Edward Smith, an Anglican, was appointed clergyman to Queanbeayn in 1838. His job was to constantly travel about the Monaro and South Coast and hold services wherever a group of people could be gathered together. He had no permanent home in the area.

Smith carried out his duties until 1842 when Rev. Edward Gifford Pryce came to the Monaro as a travelling minister. His first year was spent travelling hundreds of kilometres from one station to the next and he wrote to Bishop Broughton about the difficulties of such a ministry with no home to return to. Mercifully Bishop Broughton made time to visit the Monaro and agreed to acquiring a parsonage The Grange in 1843 and building a stone church on land belonging to William Bradley. The site was on Cooma Creek about 3 kilometres from John Lambie's and James Kirwan's properties. Thus the foundation stone of the first Monaro church, Christ Church, now in the Snowy River Shire, was laid in February 1845, although the building was not completed for another 5 years.

At the same time Father Kavangh, similarly based in Queanbeyan, was sent to the Monaro to fulfill the spiritual needs of the Roman Catholic population. For many years services where held in private houses until in 1856 a stone church was erected in Nimmitabel. Michelago's first church 1865 was a multi-purpose two-room building serving as a school and teacher's residence during the week and for worship on Sundays.

These three churches were the first of some 20 stone churches erected across the Monaro and in the Snowy Mountains, a tradition that has been perpetuated for more than 160 years. Apart from stone churches, others were built solidly of brick or modestly of weatherboard and these churches often provided the focal point for a community. Attached to the churches were schools, halls and convents allowing for education, community groups and general socializing in what were otherwise isolated rural areas.

Some churches had adjoining land dedicated as cemeteries, such as at Christ Church (in the Snowy River Shire), in other instances cemeteries were not associated with any particularly church, such as at Nimmitabel. The earliest known graves date from the 1840s, prior to that people were buried on private land often in unmarked graves. Some family graveyards still exist on early properties. As the district developed some of the earlier cemeteries proved too small or the locations inconvenient and it became necessary for larger cemeteries to be established.

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[39] Lhotsky, J *A Journey from Sydney to the Australian Alps 1834* p.79

9.3   Education

The majority of early settlers were ill educated or illiterate and as there were no schools established their children grew up illiterate. Reverend Pryce bemoaned this situation but quickly identified that the distances which families lived apart made establishing a few schools a futile thing as only a limited number of children could reach any one location. Some children were sent away to board, if the family could afford it. Ill equipped governesses or parents tutored others and some mothers ended up teaching the children of the immediate district around the kitchen table.

Surveyor Townsend's 1849 plan of the village of Cooma included a site for a school near Kirwan's improvements. As there is no record of a school operating, it would appear that it was not yet functioning. Several attempts were made to open private schools in Cooma but these were all unsuccessful. One problem was that many children had to work with their families and were unable to attend lessons until their jobs were completed.

A small group of Cooma businessmen wrote to the Board of National Education in 1861 applying for permission to build a school on the corner of Vale and Commissioner Streets. To everyone's surprise adequate money was subscribed by local residents to complete the work and the stone buildings, a schoolroom and a two-room teacher's residence, went ahead. The buildings are still in use today.

The school opened in April 1863 with 60 pupils but things did not continue to go so smoothly. The first headmaster was not adequately trained, had a family of 8, lived in cramped conditions and was poorly paid, but access to education on the Monaro had at last commenced.

Children out of town had to depend on itinerant teachers who moved from place to place, lessons were held in 'any building that is large enough, water-proof and supplied with requisite forms and desks'[40]. The inspector admitted that many schools were just huts and that if the children had waited for a more substantial building then they would have already grown up illiterate.

Nimmitabel had a private school in the 1850s, a Roman Catholic one opened in 1863 and a public school in 1874. At Peak View, Jerangle, Countegany and Numeralla half-time schools were operated in the 1870s sharing their teachers with other smaller communities. At Shannon's Flat there were enough children to open a full time school in 1906 but fluctuating attendance resulted in it being a half time school during some years and finally closing in 1965. In 1888 a school opened in the Cooma convent run by the Brigidine Sisters, in 1905 an Anglican school was established in Cooma and in 1925 St Patrick's built a separate primary school.

The families working for the Snowy Scheme put pressure on the established education facilities. Not only did the number of students double but the teachers had to deal with children from various backgrounds who didn't speak English and often had survived traumatic war experiences. Schools were expanded and some new schools built in Cooma North.

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[40] Neal, Laurie *Cooma Country* p181

9.4 Medical Assistance

For the first few decades of white settlement on the Monaro access to medical assistance was nearly impossible. Dr David Reid, who settled at Bunyan in 1832, did travel to Australia as a surgeon on the ship Baring. It does not appear that he ever practiced after arriving although it is known that he did give some medical aid from time to time.

Dr Haley settled in the Queanbeyan district in 1837 and there were doctors at Yass and Goulburn but all of these were a long way from the Monaro. The Government Gazette 1844 records that there were two doctors, Wren and Robertson, who were officially listed for the Monaroo Plains. Robertson held a run in the Bombala district but people still had to travel for miles to seek medical help. A prerequisite for a Monaro doctor was that he was a strong and capable rider, to be available at any time day or night and be prepared to ride many miles in an emergency.

The first doctor permanently based in Cooma was Winsor Merryweather who came to the village of 166 people in 1866 after acting as a ship's surgeon. He was recently qualified and did what he could but the extensiveness of the district meant that his services were not readily available to all the population. Another doctor, George Yonge Mould, had also taken up residence in Cooma. Previously he had been working on properties and was not registered in the colony as a doctor although he did have a degree. He started a dispensary in Lambie Street, Cooma, and from there he often treated people free of charge.

A benevolent asylum had been established in Lambie Street in about 1848 but it only catered for two patients and by 1858 people had started demanding a proper hospital for the area, the closest one being at Queanbeyan. A small hospital was built in Bombala Street and by 1867, such was the demand that it had been extended and become 'quite a handsome one for Cooma in those days (made of stone)'[41]. The hospital had been built with government and private funds although for many years there was a shortage of money to run or further upgrade the facility.

As Cooma grew so did the number of doctors but until the arrival of the motor vehicle they still had to be available at all hours to travel long distances on horseback to visit patients. A bush nursing service was established in Nimmitabel owing to the generosity of John Geldmacher who left his estate to the people of the village, some of which was to be used to found a private hospital.

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[41] Ibid. pp53,54

10.0   Transport & Communication

10.1   Roads & Bridges

Within a few years of Ovens's and Currie's expedition to the Monaro in 1823 the route south had become a rough track with deep ruts from the constant traffic. The route was frequently altered when the ruts became gullies. Tracks led east and west to huts and farmhouses, often passing within metres of a building.

Horse drawn carts, coaches and buggies conveyed lighter loads and people while for heavy loads bullock teams were used. The tracks taken by the bullock drays and wagons became the basis for today's network of roads. Hauling by bullock teams was costly, extremely slow and a trip to Sydney was known to take months. Bullock drivers would set off with loads of wool and be held up at creeks and rivers if there had been rain. Getting bogged was a continual hazard and an enormous amount of time was lost extricating the heavy loads. The deplorable state of the roads was one aspect that held back economic development of the Monaro.

Bullock Team Carting Wool at Rosebrook
Cooma Monaro Historical Society

The account of Mr Dibbs who travelled from Sydney to Cooma in 1860 to open a branch of the Commonwealth Banking Company illustrates the great difficulties for the traveller. The journey took 8 days. He encountered the first flood at Camden and from then on crossing every creek and river became an ordeal. The coach was bogged up to the axles numerous times and often he had to get into swirling waters to coax the horses through. Along the way the accommodation was miserable and in some instances there was no food available owing to the floods.

The first Monaro roads were cleared and looked after by private finances but in 1861 the Department of Public Works took on the responsibility of constructing and maintaining main roads. They introduced standards for road works and as roads were improved the number of regular coach trips to and from Cooma increased. More settlers had buggies but still carting with bullock teams was expensive and unreliable, mail services were irregular and people felt isolated.

Initially crossing rivers depended on a ford and later sometimes a punt. Floods cut off rivers for weeks. The first timber truss road bridge in the district was constructed over the Bredbo River in 1894. At Numeralla the river was crossed on a boat attached to a wire until a timber truss bridge was built in 1913. The timber came from Broadhead's Badja mill. A bridge wasn't built over the Big Badja River until 1931.

Ingelara Bridge 1912 was the first concrete bridge on the Monaro and over time concrete bridges replaced the old timber ones. The Badja River bridge was rebuilt in 1977, the Numeralla bridge in 1977 and the bridge at Dromore on the main highway in 1984. There does not appear to be any wooden truss bridges extant in the Shire although some timber trestle rail bridges survive such as the one over the Numeralla River. Ford crossings that didn't have much traffic were later replaced with concrete causeways.

After World War I it became necessary for roads to be made suitable for cars with pneumatic tyres which required smooth surfaces and roads were upgraded with horse-drawn equipment.

Snowy Scheme truck with timber frames bogged on the Cooma Jindabyne Road 1950
National Archives of Australia

During the 1950s and 1960s it was the Snowy Scheme which was responsible for upgrading many Monaro dirt tracks to bitumenised roads. Roads were widened, realigned and surfaces improved. Bridges and culverts, which were not adequately constructed to take loads the size of much of the large machinery, had to be rebuilt. Roads in and around the district's towns and the main roads leading to and from Cooma were all improved either by the Department of Main Roads, the Snowy Mountains Authority or by the shires.

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10.2   Railway

In 1864 a meeting at Cooma court house predicted that it wouldn't be too long before the railway came to the town. The line was opened to Goulburn in 1869 but local inhabitants became more frustrated as the years passed and no agreement or action was taken. The Premier, during a visit to Cooma in 1876, agreed that the best route to extend the railway to Cooma was via Queanbeyan. This prompted more public pressure and finally a survey of the route was undertaken in 1878.

The survey was completed but the government claimed no funds were allocated. Following an excellent wheat crop on the Monaro in 1880 which still had to rely on bullock teams to get the produce to market, some 600 people signed a petition to parliament demanding the railway be built. Within weeks funds were allocated and construction authorized.

The line would run from Queanbeyan through Michelago, Bredbo, Umeralla (Chakola), Bunyan and Cooma. The second stage was to complete a line to Bombala. The cost of the line from Queanbeyan to Michelago escalated as three tunnels and two major bridges had to be built but finally the extension was completed in 1887. The festivities for the opening of the station were quite humble with 'two casks of beer and some fights among the platelayers'[42].

To construct the next section to Cooma several camps were built such as the one at Ingelara which comprised some 50 or 60 buildings and had all the facilities of a village such as stores, hotels and shops. Other camps were at Colinton, Bredbo and Billilingera.

Even though the railway was coming to Cooma, the location of a station had not been agreed. Local people believed that the approved site, near Ti-Tree Racecourse, was isolated and too far out of town. They wanted a station at the then showground site which meant a 5 mile deviation from the original survey as well as relocation of the new showground building. The community prevailed and finally the line was opened with much fanfare in 1889.

At first Bredbo, Chakola and Bunyan were only sidings but such was the demand to use the line that proper stations were built at Bredbo and Chakola. The railway bought significant economic benefits to the Monaro. Rural produce had easy access to markets and decreased freight costs ensuring viability for sheep and cattle producers. The cost of bringing goods to the area dropped and people were pleased to be able to travel comfortably and quickly to Sydney and elsewhere. There were services 6 days of the week.

The railway also meant that the region could be promoted as a holiday destination. Yarrangobilly Caves, Rock Flat Spa and the Snowy Mountains were very popular with tourists and the area gained a romantic reputation. The scenery which could be experienced during the trip was of great interest to travellers and thus the train journey formed an important part of their holiday.

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[42] *Cooma Railway Precinct CMP* p15

Despite all this the railway ran at a loss. Some people claimed that the route taken to build the line had been too expensive but the main reason was the unviability of growing wheat on the Monaro. Wheat cartage was the mainstay for railway freight and the Monaro could not compete with other wheat growing areas due to climatic unsuitability.

Regardless of this work commenced in 1910 on the extension to Bombala, reaching Nimmitabel in 1911 and finally getting to Bombala in 1921. The delay was due to the ruggedness of the country and the outbreak of World War I which depleted government finances. The railway station at Cooma is remembered for being the departure point for troops to both world wars.

Cooma Railway Station 1925
Mitchell Library

The Snowy Scheme bought renewed activity to the Cooma station. Facilities were upgraded and the yard converted to service diesel locomotives. The line bought supplies and people for the Snowy and was well patronised by skiers travelling to the mountains to enjoy the newly opened skiing slopes and accommodation. By the 1980s the line south of Queanbeyan had become seriously deteriorated and certain sections such as the Numeralla bridge required such expensive repairs that they couldn't be justified. The line finally closed in 1988 after 100 years of operation.

10.3   Postal, Telegraph & Telephone Services

Before any official postal service for the Monaro letters were simply handed from one person to another in the hope that they might arrive at the proper destination. In 1841 official mail deliveries terminated at Queanbeyan but settlers and squatters paid 4 pounds each annually to have mail delivered to Reid's Flat (Bunyan).

1847 was the year the first post office was opened in Cooma and a weekly mail run between Goulburn and Cooma established. It seems the post office was located in Kirwan's Inn. People still complained about the length of time that mail took to reach them. The deliveries were irregular and the contractors considered unreliable but they were expected to travel enormous distances and even put their lives at risk crossing flooded rivers. In 1861 a more reputable and experienced contractor from Goulburn took over deliveries.

In 1865 a telegraph line between Queanbeyan and Cooma was completed and a telegraph office opened in the town. For years the post office had moved from one rented premises to another and in 1868 the post office and telegraph office combined and the following year John Kirwan took up the duties. Rents increased and a proposal for a purpose built post office was put forward. A government owned site at the corner Massie and Vale Street Cooma was selected and a design, in the Victorian Italianate style by Colonial Architect James Barnet, approved. The building was constructed of granitic gneiss, a locally quarried stone, and was completed in 1879.

The earliest evidence of telephones in the district is found in station diaries[43], apparently there were connections between the Woodstock, Hazeldean, Bobundara and Matong properties in 1898. The first government exchange was opened in Cooma in 1904.

10.4   Newspapers

The gold rush at Kiandra, even though short lived, had an important impact on Monaro's development in many ways. In 1860 the newspaper The Alpine Pioneer was published in the gold fields and the next year the printing presses were moved to Cooma and the Manaro Mercury established.

GTC Miller worked on the Mercury but after a difference of opinion with the proprietor he decided to produce his own paper The Cooma Express in 1879. The district seemed able to support two newspapers for the next few decades but after a change of ownership for the Express in 1923, the new owner concluded that two papers weren't economically viable and in 1932 merged the Mercury with the Express. At the same time the former Cooma School of Arts building on Bombala Street was purchased and converted into newspaper offices and for the next 60 years the Cooma Monaro Express was printed there until it was moved to more modern premises in 1999. The School of Arts building, now with a modern façade, is presently vacant although a number of options for reuse have been explored over recent years.

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[43] Neal, Lauri *Cooma Country* p74

11.0   Law & Order, Governing & War

11.1   Lock-Ups, Court Houses, Gaols & Police Stations

Initially it was illegal to even venture, let alone settle, outside the Nineteen Counties but for all the threats of punishment there were no police to implement the law. John Lhotsky commented that when he passed through the valley of Michelago in 1834 that many illegal dealings were going on. Lawlessness continued seemingly unabated although there are records of police chasing bushrangers across the Monaro that same year.

John Lambie, the first public official for the area, was appointed Commissioner of Crown Lands for the Monaro District in 1837 and was based in Queanbeyan. Two years later a party of four troopers, members of the Border Police Force acting under the Commissioner, was established on the Monaro to help enforce the law. Their duties were to collect dues of the Crown, settle disputes between graziers and eject unlicensed squatters from Crown lands.

Lambie found great difficulty administering the large territory of Monaro from Queanbeyan and after trying a number of camp sites established his base in the area that became Cooma, which was reasonably central for his activities. He claimed 1,280 acres (512 hectares) which had been originally part of Kirwan's Kuma run and built his house, office and two lock-ups.

In December 1846 Cooma was declared a place to hold Courts of Petty Sessions with Mr Lambie taking the position of Chief Magistrate, a clerk of Petty Sessions, a chief constable, two constables (with a horse each) and a lock-up-keeper to assist with implementing the law. Robert Dawson was appointed the first clerk and Charles Walters the first chief constable in January 1847.

The same year premises were rented in Cooma from James Kirwan at 10 pounds per annum as a court house and lock-up until a government constructed building incorporating a court room, two cells and a guardroom was erected in 1849 on land that was to become 3 -5 Lambie Street[44].

Surveyor Townsend's plan for Cooma 1849 shows two huts near John Lambie's house and office as 'old lock-up', a constable's hut on a portion of land 3-5 Lambie Street nominated as 'Reserve for Court House & Lock-up' and another hut for the Chief Constable. By 1853 there was a clerk, a chief constable, a 'European' Corporal, two 'native' troopers and a constable who also acted as a lock-up keeper, stationed in Cooma.[45]

Lambie acted as magistrate until 1857 the same year he relinquished his position of Crown Lands Commissioner. The information which he gathered, during his tenure, makes a valuable contribution to understanding the development of Cooma and the region. Unfortunately several fires at Lambie's house and office in 1859 destroyed many of these important records.

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[44] No evidence of these early buildings remains
[45] Colonial Estimates 1853 – New South Wales

By 1860 the original court house and lock-up proved to be too small and the number of police inadequate particularly owing to the influx of people from the Kiandra gold fields. In 1862 Cooma became the headquarters of the Southern Police District. A new courthouse and lock-up, set to the rear of a large site on Vale Street, designed by Colonial Architect James Barnet, was built in 1863 and the former building became a gaol.

Problems were still not resolved and crime continued to increase particularly cattle stealing. There were reports of the new lock-up being so poorly constructed that within less than two years parts were falling down, the place was very cold and poorly ventilated and the lock-up keeper's family had such limited quarters they had to sleep in one of the cells. Similarly accommodation at the gaol was cramped and did not provide adequate facilities or security. Even the new courthouse site was considered unsuitable to be able to extend the building as a proper gaol.

The Colonial Architect submitted plans for a separate large gaol in 1867 but this was not completed until 1872 and not occupied until 1873. The new gaol operated for only three years and subsequently became an asylum. Over the years some prisoners were held there but most were sent to the large gaol at Goulburn. This lasted until the 1950s when the buildings were recommissioned as a gaol.

A substantial court house was finally erected in Cooma in 1887 to plans drawn up by James Barnet. The new building was imposing both through siting and design and incorporated formal embellishments which indicated to the populace the importance and power of the law.

A police station was established at Nimmitabel about 1855 and a court first convened in a room in a local hotel in 1862. The same year a watch house with court room was completed but was too small for proceedings and the following year a stone court house erected. It still operates as a police station. Police stations were also operated at Michelago, Jerangle and Numeralla.

Nimmitabel Police Station c1900
Justice & Police Museum

11.2   Bushrangers

Bushrangers were a hazard for travellers and settlers on the Monaro from the late 1820s. The tracks were lonely and bushrangers often worked in groups such as the 13 who reportedly tried to escape from the Monaro via Eden by rebuilding a shipwrecked vessel[46]. The Bushranger Act came into force in 1830 and serious punishment was meted out for those breaking the law. All the same men with nick names like Jack the Rammer and Joe the Milkman continued to terrorise the settlers. There were raids and shootings at Michelago, Rock Flat and Wambrook. Big Jim and Long Joe were captured, escaped and recaptured.

The 1840s saw a decline in this sort of activity but the problem resurfaced in the 1860s in association with the gold rushes. Coaches with gold and mail were held up by such men as Frank (Darkie) Gardiner and Ben Hall. In 1865 the Felons Apprehension Act made it legal for anyone to apprehend any outlaws, dead or alive and punishments for harbouring criminals were very severe.

The Clarke gang, which comprised two Clarke boys and four other young men, gained as much notoriety in the district as the Kelly gang in Victoria. They were linked with Gardiner and Hall. The Clarke family settled at Jinden Creek where they lived a rough, hilly billy existence, influenced by the wild life at the near-by Araluen gold fields. The entire family ran foul of the law although it wasn't until 1865 that the brothers were actually charged with anything. One of their most bloody escapades was the shooting of four policemen after conducting robberies at Michelago. Their most famous and final exploit which ranged from Cooma to Reid's Flat and Rose Valley led to their arrest and hanging in 1867.

The severe laws, increased numbers of police sent to the district and large rewards brought an end to the bushranging era on the Monaro.

11.3   Municipal

During the 1850s, and prior to Cooma being proclaimed a municipality, the Pastoral District of Maneroo was represented on the colony's Legislative Council by an elected representative with several people contesting the position. The representative was not always a local person.

After a petition was signed in 1879 requesting that Cooma be proclaimed a municipality the Governor officially authorised the constitution of the Municipal District of Cooma. The next year an election for aldermen and auditors took place at the Cooma courthouse and the Cooma Municipal Council formed.

Initially meetings were held in the School of Arts but were transferred to a building in Massie Street in 1883 where they continued until the erection of proper council chambers on Dawson Street in 1912. There was concern that the area of the municipality was too large and that ratepayers were subsidizing roads primarily used by other shires' residents. Consequently the size of the Cooma Shire was reduced by about three quarters, from 16,800 acres to 3,840 acres (6,720 hectares to 1,536 hectares), the balance being taken over by the Monaro and Dalgety shires.

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[46]Neal, Lauri *Cooma Country* p57.

The first council for the Monaro Shire was elected in 1907 and had its headquarters in Cooma. In 1981 the Cooma Municipal Council was amalgamated with the Monaro Shire to form the Cooma-Monaro Shire. In 2004 a small part of the Yarrowlumla Shire, which included the town of Michelago and some areas to the north, were merged into the Cooma-Monaro Shire.

11.4   The Two Wars

Many men from the Monaro enthusiastically signed up to go to the fronts of the first World War. The famous Snowy River Route March was advertised in 1916, the aim of which was to enlist recruits the whole distance from Delegate to Goulburn. Fifty two men arrived in Cooma and forty more joined them there. They continued the march and by the time they had reach Goulburn the ranks had swelled to 140. The drill hall in Bombala Street, Cooma, was erected as local army headquarters.
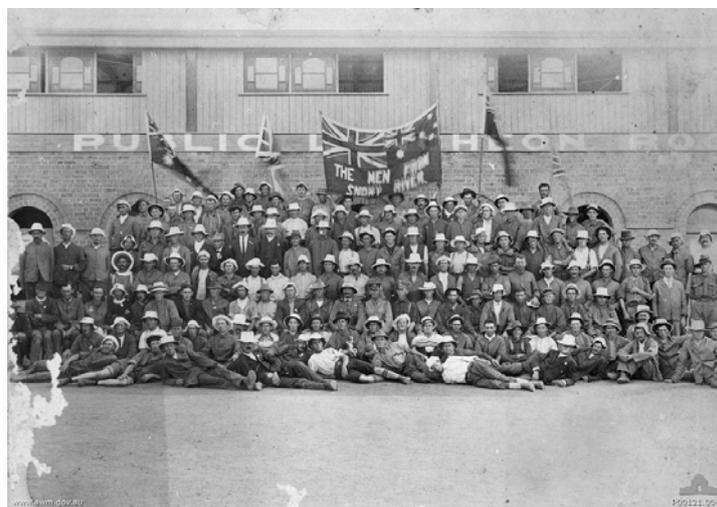
The Snowy River Route March
Australian War Memorial

Many were honoured for courageous service and many were injured or died. Locally organisations such as the Red Cross raised funds to be sent to the troops to bring some small comforts to their lives. When the troops returned committees were formed to assist them to re-establish their lives, one type of assistance was the granting of small rural blocks known as solider settlers' blocks.

To mark the service of these men every town and a number of small communities raised funds to erect memorials in their honour. Many of the memorials were made of local granite, the one in Cooma coming from the Coolringdon property.

The second World War in 1939 again took men from the area and brought the war right to Australia's shores. Women took over what had previously been men's jobs and the Women's Land Army was particularly strong in rural areas where women learned how to run farms and do the work. Again some large grazing properties in the district, that were considered to be under utilized, were subdivided into smaller holdings and allocated to the returned men who applied by ballot. This time the size of the blocks was larger than the WWI scheme where the blocks had been between 250 to 1,500 acres (150 to 600 hectares), proven not to be enough land to be able to conduct a viable farming operation on the Monaro.

12.0   Developing a Cultural Life

12.1   Schools of Arts & Community Halls

Cooma's first School of Arts was held in rooms belonging to the White Horse Hotel and later during the 1860s in a hall behind Hewitson's Hotel, formally on the present site of the CBA bank, where dances and other activities took place. A committee was formed in 1876 and their policy was to own their own premises. A fund was established and by 1880 adequate funds for a building and a block of land on Bombala Street had been donated. The next year the building was completed and a librarian appointed so a library could be established.

Membership started to decrease and there was discussion that the building was not located close enough to the centre of town. A billiard table was installed and popularity immediately increased. The Victor Picture Co. showed moving pictures there in 1911 and by then there was a surplus of funds and the committee purchased a new site on Vale Street and erected another building. The original building became the Victor Theatre until, in 1936, the presses for the Cooma Express were moved in and the newspaper was published from there for the next 50 years.

Other community groups were active in the district particularly the Masons who held meetings in Cooma from 1863 and built a temple in Massie Street in 1913. After World War I some of the smaller communities, such as Numeralla 1920 and Peak View 1920 built memorial halls. Halls built at Bredbo 1938, Michelago 1971 and Nimmitabel 1901 are still focal points for community and social activities.

Jerangle Hall erected in 1886 was originally a police station with holding cells. The CWA purchased the hall for community use in 1996. On the other hand the Kybean Hall, which was originally a house at Middlingbank, was relocated for CWA rooms in 1957 and then handed over to the local community.

Shannon's Flat hall was built in 1946 with money raised from woolshed dances and donations from local residents. It was built as an all denominations church hall, a function centre and as a memorial to those men who fought in the two world wars.

A number of community halls have been sold and are now used for other purposes such as the Anembo Hall c1920 which has been relocated and converted to a shearing shed[47] and at Chakola the church hall built in 1934 has been taken over by Cooma-Monaro Railway Inc., a volunteer groups which manages the local railway.

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[47] Lawley, Ross The Significance of Community Rural Buildings in the Cooma-Monaro Shire p12

12.2   Sports

The first horse races on the Monaro were held at Reid's Flat in 1850. Horse races were then held at Ti Tree Flat from 1855, possibly earlier, for the next few years. During the1860s a racecourse was set up at Cooma Creek but with 320 acres (128 hectares) being dedicated as a recreation reserve in 1871 the Ti Tree Racecourse came into being. A timber grandstand was built around the early 1900s.

From 1892 Ti-Tree Flat was also used as a polo field and it is claimed that Banjo Paterson scribbled his famous poem *The Geebung Polo Club* on his cuff at dinner in Cooma and first recited it at the presentation that evening.

Annual picnic races were popular from the 1930s to 1977 and became an important social event with a ball in the evening. Races are held at Ti Tree once a year now featuring the Sundwoners Cup and the Cooma Cup and the annual event is still very important to the community.

Edible fish such as Murray cod and perch were found in the Murrumbidgee by the earliest settlers but trout was the fish that anglers preferred for sport.
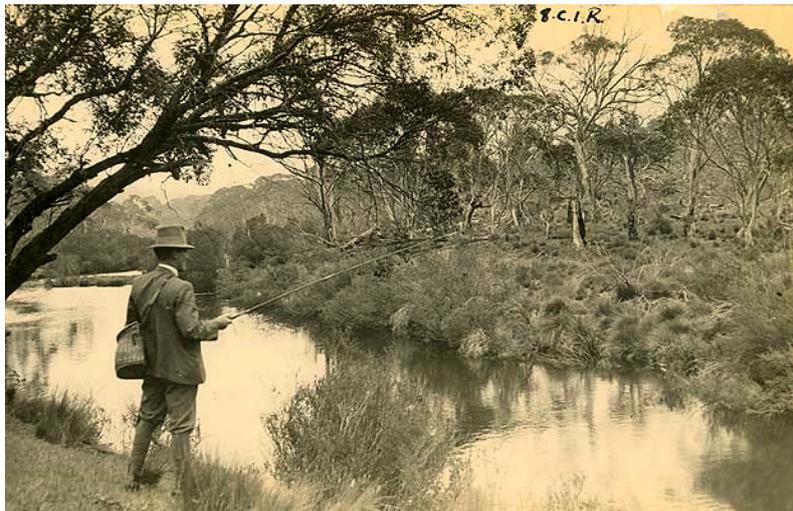
Trout Fishing on the Big Badja
NSW State Records

Adam Agnew introduced trout to the Badja and Numeralla Rivers in 1875 and in 1892 trout were released into the Murrumbidgee at Michelago. Since then trout fishing has been one of the area's main sports and tourist attractions and trout are found in many permanent rivers. The trout, brown and rainbow, require regular restocking.

The Cooma Golf Club was formed in 1903 and the first course was in the vicinity of Myalla Road and followed Cooma Creek. In 1946 a new course was established on the Dry Plains Road and a new clubhouse built. The development of the Snowy Scheme resulted in increased interest in golf and the course and club house were extended and improved. Unfortunately the clubhouse burnt down in 1990 but was rebuilt the following year.

12.3   Shows & Showgrounds

The precursor to agricultural shows in the district was ploughing competitions held at various locations. These started to include prizes for sheep and a show was known to take place in the area which is now the Cooma cemetery in 1870/71. Apparently at the time different sections of the show were held at different locations.

Two associations were amalgamated in 1883 to form the Pastoral & Agricultural Association and the next year the first show held, still in two locations. In 1885 five acres (2 hectares) of the Common, which had been approved in 1869 and dedicated in 1870, were allocated as a showground and the next year an iron roofed timber pavilion constructed. The first show was held in 1887 but that year a decision was taken to re-route the proposed railway line and locate the railway station on the showground site. The pavilion was duly moved to a new location on Cooma Back Creek where the show has been an annual event ever since. Continued success prompted the building of a grandstand in 1904 and from then on other facilities have been added. Unfortunately the original pavilion burnt down in October 1997.

Cooma Showground in the early 20th century
Cooma 150 Years On

The balance of the Common, on the hill behind the railway yard, is now known as Radio Hill owing to the radio transmitter erected at the peak. It is a dedicated travelling stock route reserve and the southern part a dedicated grassland reserve.

Nimmitabel's first show was held in 1903 and continued to be held annually until 1939, the year that World War II started. After a lapse of more than 10 years the show committee and the society were reformed and in 1952 the show became an annual event once again.

12.4   Tourism

Before the railway arrived in Cooma the Snowy Mountains were recognised as an important tourism destination of NSW but the journey to get to these places was too arduous for most people. The railway brought people safely and speedily to the mountains, trout streams, caves and the general geological phenomena of the district.

Cooma was the main centre for the region and those hotels, which developed because of the gold rush became popular again as the first stage of a Monaro or Snowy Mountains holiday. In 1909 the state government constructed the Hotel Kosciuszko which was so popular that the accommodation for 70 guests had to be doubled within the next few years. The hotel was destroyed by fire in 1951 and reopened in 1959 as Sponar's Lakeside Inn.

The Caves hotel at Yarrangobilly was also constructed by the state government as was the Creel, on the Thredbo River, where people went for trout fishing. The streams and rivers on the Monaro were being annually stocked with fingerlings to ensure a good supply for the fishermen. The district became a significant NSW's tourist destination.

Cooma became known as 'The Gateway to the Snowy Mountains' but in more recent years has preferred to be recognised as the centre of the Monaro and a tourist destination in itself.

Coaches departing Sydney to commence the Cooma to Kosciuszko motor service c1915
Cooma Monaro Historical Society

13.0   The Snowy Scheme

Following some severe droughts in NSW a royal commission was set up in 1884 to assess the possibility of using river water for irrigation. One option was to divert the snow-fed waters of the Snowy River into the Murrumbidgee by an open channel over the mountains. Interest in the idea fluctuated according to the seasons.

After World War I a project was suggested where the waters of the Snowy could be used to generate electricity to supplement Sydney's power stations. This idea developed into a proposal that the waters also be used to supplement Sydney's water supplies as well as the supplies of towns along the route. This led to a number of different groups wanting power and water sent in their direction and the NSW government came up with a scheme for the Snowy River to supply both irrigation and power.

The scheme was approved in 1949 and Cooma selected as the headquarters. The decision rapidly transformed the quiet rural town with a population of 2,000 into a major centre of 10,000 people. Two thirds of the Snowy's workers were immigrants, many from war-torn Europe.

Immediately plans were drawn up and land taken over for accommodation, offices and other facilities. The land chosen was north of the township along Mittagang Road and extending east to the railway line. At first the proposal was for Council to install all the necessary services such as roads, footpaths, water and sewerage but the Authority took over in an effort to expedite the works to be undertaken prior to buildings being erected. Within a year 14 houses were completed, 68 were in work and barracks had been built for 500 men[48].

Suddenly in Cooma's streets, schools, shops, railway station, everywhere, people were speaking different languages. People, from over 40 different countries, who may have been on opposing sides during the war had to put aside their old enmities. Cooma is seen as the first multi-cultural place in Australia. Shops started to provide a wider range of food and the first delicatessen opened where a cup of coffee could be bought. Facilities had to be expanded and more services offered. New schools were built and roads upgraded to be able to take the heavy equipment being transported to the work sites. An airport was established which allowed all Monaro residents to travel to Sydney in an hour compared with the overnight train trip or seven hours by car.

The Snowy Scheme brought Australia to the world's attention as a world class engineering feat for its time and enabled Cooma and the district to flourish.

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[48] Ibid p258

14.0   Conclusion

Numerous forces, people and events have created the heritage character of the Cooma-Monaro Shire. From the 1830s it has been primarily a pastoral region relying on sheep and cattle production. This reliance on such a limited economic base has meant fluctuating financial benefits which in recent years have resulted in many younger people moving to bigger centres with different employment opportunities. A number of the larger properties have been broken up into smaller holdings with some places being unviable although small rural holdings are now popular for lifestyle reasons. In recent years the droughts and diminishing water supplies have brought further difficulties and the threat of bush fires an annual concern.

Mining has been sporadically revived but without long term good results. The Snowy Scheme brought people and prosperity and transformed Cooma into a vibrant cosmopolitan town with improved services and facilities. Many families remained, after building was complete, contributing their culture and skills to the region.

The tourism industry has increased particularly during the last 50 years following opening up of the ski fields in many instances owing to the road access built for construction of the Snowy Scheme. Visitors travelling to the mountains for skiing and fishing also tour the Monaro district appreciating the distinctive scenery and the quaint villages.

Visitors to Snowy Mountains Authority Visitors Centre
Headquarters in background 1959
Cooma Monaro Historical Society

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Land Titles Office	www.lands.nsw.gov.au
National Library	www.nla.gov.au
National Park & Wildlife Service	www.npws.nsw.gov.au
National Trust NSW	www.nsw.nationaltrust.org.au
Parish Maps Preservation Project	www.parishmaps.lands.nsw.gov.au
Monaro Pioneers	www.monaropioneers.com
Picman Pictures	www.sl.nsw.gov.au/picman
Picture Australia	www.pictureaustralia.org
State Library	www.sl.nsw.gov.au