SOLDIER SETTLEMENT AFTER WORLD WAR ONE IN SOUTH WESTERN VICTORIA

by

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Deakin University

July 2002
I certify that the thesis entitled:

Soldier Settlement after World War One in South Western Victoria

submitted for the degree of: Doctor of Philosophy

is the result of my own research, except where otherwise acknowledged, and that this thesis in whole or in part has not been accepted for an award, including a higher degree, to any other university or institution.

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Abstract

This thesis addresses the physical aspects of farming on soldier settlement blocks in south west Victoria. The undeveloped land, high establishment costs, stock losses through animal diseases and lack of managerial skills all contributed to the settlers’ inability to meet their financial commitments. These factors are analysed, as are the effects of declining rural commodities prices during the 1920s and 1930s.

In addition, the relationship between the settlers and the successive administrative agencies is examined. The scheme was administered by the Closer Settlement Board from its inception until 1932 and much of the discussion during this period concerns the interaction between settler and inspector. Soldier settlement after World War One represented one of the last attempts to create a large body of ‘yeoman’ farmers. From the early 1920s there was an increasing dichotomy between the ‘yeoman’ and the ‘managerial’ ideologies. This dichotomy placed additional pressure on soldier settlers who were expected to be ‘efficient’ without adequate finances.

In the post C.S.B. era, the focus shifts to the attempts by the Closer Settlement Commission to salvage the scheme and its greater understanding of the problems faced by the settlers. While this part of the thesis necessarily becomes more political, the physical and financial environment in which the soldier settlers worked was still an important factor in their success or failure. Unlike the C.S.B. which tended to blame soldier settlers for their situation, the Commission acknowledged that settlers’ ability to succeed was often constrained by circumstances beyond their control. Under the latter administration, instalments were written off, additional land was allocated and finally the blocks were revalued to guarantee the men at least some equity in their farms. Those settlers who had survived until these changes were instituted received a ‘successful outcome of their life’s work’.
Acknowledgments

I am indebted to my supervisors Stephen Alomes, Monica Keneley and Gordon Forth for their encouragement, guidance and patience over the period of years which it has taken to complete this thesis. Also my wife Mary for her understanding and ability to undertake more than her fair share of the work on our farm.
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<tr>
<td>C.S.B.</td>
<td>Closer Settlement Board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C.S.C.</td>
<td>Closer Settlement Commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G.S.W.</td>
<td>Gunshot Wound</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MLA</td>
<td>Member of the Legislative Assembly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MLC</td>
<td>Member of the Legislative Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R.S.S.I.L.A.</td>
<td>Returned Soldiers’ and Sailors’ Imperial League of Australia (Throughout the text the abbreviation RSL is used.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VPD</td>
<td>Victorian Parliamentary Debates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VPP</td>
<td>Victorian Parliamentary Papers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VPRO</td>
<td>Victorian Public Record Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VPRS</td>
<td>Victorian Public Record Series</td>
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Conversion Table

During the period of soldier settlement, the Imperial system of weights and measures was in use throughout Australia. Imperial units have therefore been used throughout this thesis. The conversion factors for those metric measures in standard usage today are listed below.

<table>
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<th>Imperial.</th>
<th>Metric.</th>
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<tr>
<td>1 bushel (bus)</td>
<td>0.0364 cubic metres. (Used as a measurement for grain)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 acre</td>
<td>0.405 hectares</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 hundredweight (cwt)</td>
<td>50.80 kilograms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 pound (lb)</td>
<td>454 grams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 ounce (oz)</td>
<td>28.3 grams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 inch (in)</td>
<td>25.4 millimetres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 foot (ft)</td>
<td>30.5 centimetres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 yard (yd)</td>
<td>0.914 metres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 mile</td>
<td>1.61 kilometres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 gallon</td>
<td>4.55 litres</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Before the 14 February 1966, Australian currency was expressed in pounds, shillings and pence. (£ s d) The appropriate conversions are listed below.

| £1 (one pound) | $2.00. |
| 1s. (one shilling) | $0.10 |
| 1d (one penny) | $0.01 (approximately) |
SECTION ONE

The story of land settlement is a long record of half-baked policy, uncertain objectives and faltering applications.

F. W. Eggleston.

Chapter One

Introduction

In Australia every beginning has not only been difficult, but scarred with human agony and squalor.

Manning Clark.¹

The subject of this thesis is soldier settlement in South West Victoria after World War One. The particular foci to be explored are the settlers’ interaction with their physical environment and the effect this environment had on their subsequent success or failure. In analysing this interaction, the changes in farming practices, including the intensification of land use necessitated by the growth of closer settlement, will be addressed. In the latter part of the thesis, the focus shifts to the administrative changes initiated by the Closer Settlement Commission and the effects these changes had on the settlers.²

While environmental factors provided significant constraints on the settlers’ progress, human elements were also important as the men struggled to cope with situations that would have been beyond their powers, even if they were in good physical and mental health. The undeveloped land, declining commodity prices, high establishment costs, heavy stock losses and lack of managerial skills all contributed to the settlers’ inability to meet their financial commitments. A


² Section Four: The Reward gets Reassessed.
number were in poor health due to their wartime experiences and this had the potential to adversely affect their chances of success. The soldier settlement scheme will be analysed from the time the returned soldiers applied to become settlers, until a significant number forfeited, sold or paid for their blocks.3

Soldier settlement was adopted as an important part of the repatriation of returned soldiers in every state of Australia after World War One. The reasons for this will be addressed in chapter four.4 The schemes were administered by the individual states with funding provided by the Commonwealth. Within the first decade, soldier settlers in all the states were in financial difficulties5 with substantial losses occurring for the Commonwealth, the individual states and the soldier settlers.6 Most states held Royal Commissions while attempting to salvage the

3 After this event, they ceased to be soldier settlers in an administrative sense and became freehold farmers. Therefore, information on their later lives is not readily available.

4 Chapter Four: Reasons for the Adoption of Soldier Settlement as a Significant Form of Repatriation.


6 Report on the Losses Due to Soldier Settlement By Mr. Justice Pike, Commonwealth Parliamentary Papers, 1929.
The success rate in Victoria was higher than in the other states with eighty-three per cent of settlers still on their blocks in 1929. However, as shown in Table 1.1, the financial losses were still significant.

### Table 1.1 Retention rates and losses for soldier settlement in Australia up to 1929

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Original number of settlers</th>
<th>Remaining in 1929.</th>
<th>Percentage Remaining (%)</th>
<th>Total Losses Per State</th>
<th>Losses per Head Remaining Settlers</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>N.S.W.</td>
<td>9,302</td>
<td>6,649</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>£7,003,950</td>
<td>£1,053</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>11,140</td>
<td>9,249</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>£7,721,891</td>
<td>£835</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queensland</td>
<td>6,031</td>
<td>3,617</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>£1,853,315</td>
<td>£512</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.A.</td>
<td>4,082</td>
<td>2,754</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>£3,565,829</td>
<td>£1,295</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W. A.</td>
<td>5,030</td>
<td>3,545</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>£2,059,368</td>
<td>£581</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tasmania</td>
<td>1,976</td>
<td>777</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>£1,321,169</td>
<td>£1,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>37,561</td>
<td>26,591</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>£23,525,522</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


In Victoria, the administrative agency for the dry land estates was the Closer Settlement Board, which had previously administered the pre-war closer settlement schemes. It was responsible for acquiring the land, advancing money for stock and improvements, advising the settlers, and attempting to ensure that

---


8 The State Rivers and Water Supply Commission was responsible for the irrigable lands.

9 In future referred to as the C.S.B.

loans were repaid. The Board was under direct ministerial control which later led to complaints of political interference with the decision-making process.\footnote{See chapter twelve: The Era of ‘Brutality’, The Work of the Closer Settlement Commission.} In 1932, the Closer Settlement Commission\footnote{In future referred to as the C.S.C.} replaced the C.S.B. The new body was ministerially independent and not subject to the same political pressures.

It is argued in this thesis that, irrespective of the personal failings of the soldier settlers, the environmental factors\footnote{Factors described as environmental include land fertility, waterlogging/flooding, and animal diseases. They were all influenced by the physical environment which existed in south west Victoria when the settlers took up their blocks.} which impacted on the actual business of farming had a greater influence on the fortunes of the men than has hitherto been recognised by researchers. In much of South West Victoria, with the condition of the land and the available scientific knowledge, a majority of soldier settlers would have been at risk of failure during the 1920s without extensive government assistance.\footnote{This is even without allowing for the additional impact of the depressed rural commodity prices during the 1920s and 1930s.}

Soldier settlement estates in Victoria can be divided into two main categories. In the first, blocks were subdivided out of Crown lands and settlers had to develop farms from the natural environment. The Mallee is the largest example of this category. In regions where insufficient Crown land was available, existing
grazing or farming properties were purchased on the open market. The previous history of pastoralism in South West Victoria ensured that the Hamilton region came into the second category and all the settlers studied were allocated land subdivided from existing properties.

In choosing the Hamilton Administrative Region, it was recognised that the Western District held an important place in the history of Victoria. A perception existed, dating from Major Mitchell’s expedition in 1836, that the region was good grazing land. If soldier settlement could succeed anywhere in the State, then Western Victoria was the obvious place. Conversely, if soldier settlement could not succeed in ‘Australia Felix’, then it would be unlikely to be successful elsewhere.

The larger than anticipated number of successful applicants for soldier settlement blocks and the policy of buying land on the open market were partially responsible for rising land prices. The ceiling on the price of blocks under the Soldier Settlement Act ensured that both the quantity and quality of the land allocated to soldier settlers were less than originally planned.17 For soldier


16 See Appendix Two for the Land Tax classifications of soldier settlement estates in the region. The majority of the blocks were Class 3 or 4, which had been classified as capable of carrying one or less than one sheep per acre respectively.
settlers to succeed on small blocks the existing farm practices would have to be changed and the environment modified. Wool growing, previously carried out over much of the South West Victoria, was not profitable enough per acre to enable settlers to meet loan repayments, provide working expenses and ensure a reasonable standard of living for their wives and families. Therefore the C.S.B. often directed settlers towards more intensive, and, hopefully, more profitable enterprises. Rural optimism suggested that everything seemed possible if only ‘man’ applied himself to the task. Writers such as E. J. Brady and Thomas Cherry had advocated the philosophy that man could shape the land to his own will.

Cherry claimed that

The farmer has ceased to be a mere labourer, and has become a manufacturer, but to obtain the best results from his farm he requires to know how to work his estate, and he must also have some knowledge of the many branches of natural science. The soil, the plant and the animal are his domain. Modern knowledge has made our power over each of these three factors nearly complete; they all require to be controlled and directed as well as watched.

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18 While the previous grazing enterprises were often profitable over the whole property, their profitability per acre was low. Therefore, on the smaller acreages available to soldier settlers, it was necessary to increase the profitability per acre.

19 T. Cherry, Victorian Agriculture, D. W. Patterson, Melbourne, 1913, p. 278.
Soldier settlers would find that farming knowledge was not ‘nearly complete’. In addition, Cherry’s prediction that there was ‘no reason for alarm’ about the level of agricultural commodity prices was overly optimistic.\textsuperscript{20}

Settlers soon discovered that changes in farming practices were expensive and did not necessarily lead to increased profits. When the environment is examined, it becomes apparent that much of South West Victoria was unsuitable for closer settlement on the scale laid down by the Act. Rocky areas south of Hamilton provided ideal breeding grounds for rabbits.\textsuperscript{21} Steep hillsides around Casterton and Merino made cultivation difficult and a significant acreage throughout the region was poorly drained, waterlogged\textsuperscript{22} and swampy. On several estates, extensive regrowth of gum saplings had to be removed. The intensification of farming combined with the physiography of the land led to a rapid increase in animal diseases.\textsuperscript{23} These led to production losses and the available remedies were expensive, often ineffective and potentially dangerous to livestock. The level of nutrition in the existing pastures was often inadequate without considerable improvement. Soldier settlement was more successful in the region after World

\textsuperscript{20} ibid., p. 283.

\textsuperscript{21} Much of Greenhills Estate was stony ground. L. G. Lomas, Western district farmers, 1914-1927. PhD thesis, Monash University, 1979, p. 582.

\textsuperscript{22} Waterlogging occurs when all the air in the soil is replaced by water. See Appendix One: Glossary.

\textsuperscript{23} The rise in animal diseases will be discussed in detail in chapter eight. Briefly, numerous blocks were waterlogged which led to a significant increase in liver fluke and other intestinal parasites. The small blocks meant that wetter paddocks could not be avoided during the wetter months.
War Two. However, these later settlers enjoyed a ‘boom’ in commodity prices in the early 1950s which enabled the regular use of superphosphate and widespread pasture improvement.

**Boundaries of the Study**

The area administered from the town of Hamilton provides convenient parameters for research purposes. Victoria was split into divisions for administrative purposes and the Western District was divided between Geelong and Hamilton. The latter region delineates the boundaries for this study. However, no evidence has been found to suggest that soldier settlers in the outlying areas saw themselves as part of a discrete social or historical region based on Hamilton or accorded it any special significance. They tended to look towards their nearest town (Apsley, Casterton, Coleraine, Macarthur, Merino, Portland or Warrnambool) for business or social activities. These towns were up to ninety miles from Hamilton. Inspectors were located in the smaller towns and, for men without motor cars, distance was critical. Supplies were ordered from Melbourne or purchased either in the local store or nearest town. Therefore, Hamilton will

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24 Superphosphate is made by the addition of sulphuric acid to rock phosphate. The rock phosphate has traditionally been obtained from decomposed bird droppings.

25 The World War Two scheme will be discussed in more detail in chapter fourteen.

26 Dryland divisions included Melbourne, Western District (Geelong and Hamilton/Horsham), Mallee, Northern (Beechworth), Eastern (Sale) and Bendigo.
merely be used as a convenient reference point to define the area under
discussion.

The region administered from Hamilton was contained in a rough square with the
sea as a southern boundary. Approximately 450 soldier settlers had blocks in this
area with slightly over half surviving until 1938. The eastern perimeter went
from Warrnambool in the south to Balmoral and Apsley in the north. The South
Australian border was the western boundary. This area encompassed the Shires of
Glenelg, Wannon, Dundas, Minhamite, Portland, Belfast and parts of the Shires
of Kowree, Mt Rouse and Warrnambool. (See Map 1.1) The total area is about
100 by 120 miles.

27 This figure is taken from the Annual Report of the Closer Settlement Board, *Victorian
Parliamentary Papers*, 1927. It would only be approximate. There are 160 boxes of
Advances files for the Hamilton/Horsham district with an average of four files in each
box. If we use this figure we come up with 640 settlers. Some of these were civilian
closer settlers, a number of whom went on to their blocks prior to the War, others (a
small number) are from the Horsham district; and another group are migrant settlers, both
returned soldiers from Britain and members of the Indian Army who arrived under the
Australian Farms Scheme. Therefore an estimate of 450 settlers is reasonable. However,
on some occasions when a settler transferred to another block a new DSL number was
issued and a new file was created. It is difficult to determine if the transferee was classed
as a failure at Block ‘A’ (With his name added to the list of ‘failed settlers’) but a success
at block ‘B’. Any figures as to the number of soldier settlers should be treated as a guide
only. For a further discussion on the discrepancy see Chapter four: Reasons for the
Adoption of Soldier Settlement as a Significant Form of Repatriation.
Differences to Earlier Research.

This thesis will differ in approach from previous works on soldier settlement in two main respects. Firstly, it focuses on the physical aspects of farming and the environmental factors which affected soldier settlement. The story of soldier settlement is, on one level, the story of men vis-a-vis the bureaucracy while
coping with depressed demand for rural commodities. It is also the story of pioneering farmers attempting to survive in an inhospitable environment. Marilyn Lake saw the Western District as being ‘good land’\(^\text{28}\) but by 1920 the quality of the land in the region had greatly declined from that described by Major Thomas Mitchell in 1836.\(^\text{29}\)

Secondly, this thesis will examine the policies of the C.S.C. and their effects on the soldier settlers. The influence of the Commission has been insufficiently emphasised by other historians. While physical, economic and environmental factors prevented settlers making a profit, the appointment of the C.S.C. was of critical importance. From that time, administrative policy reflected a greater understanding of the continuing physical constraints on the settlers’ progress.

Soldier settlement in the Western District has been under-researched, particularly in relation to the physical aspects of farming.\(^\text{30}\) Three historians who have provided valuable and perceptive analysis of soldier settlement in the region are Marilyn Lake\(^\text{31}\), Les Lomas\(^\text{32}\) and Monica Keneley.\(^\text{33}\) Their studies all have

\(^{28}\) Lake, op. cit., 1987, See p. 113 for Lake’s views on the Hamilton District.


\(^{30}\) One researcher who has studied the physical aspects of soldier settlement is M. Fletcher, The small farm ideal: Closer settlement in the Maffra Sale Area, 1911-1938. MA thesis, Monash University, 1987.


\(^{32}\) Lomas, op. cit., 1979.
limitations, either chronologically or due to their emphases, in explaining the problems faced by soldier settlers in the Hamilton region throughout the life of the scheme. These, and other works will be critically examined in chapter two.

There are considerable advantages in examining soldier settlement on a regional basis. The adoption of a micro approach provides an opportunity to investigate significant issues, which have proved difficult to analyse in detail during the broader studies of soldier settlement noted above. This thesis will also address the dichotomy between the myth and the reality of what it meant to be a returned soldier, specifically one who was a soldier settler. This gulf will be explored in detail in chapter three, ‘The Social Context: The Dichotomy between the Myth and the Reality of Soldier Settlement’.

Several issues competently assessed by other historians will not be examined in this study. Lomas has focussed on the political aspects of land purchases, discussing in detail the actions of landholders who, alternatively, wanted to sell their land to the C.S.B. or prevent the Board from acquiring it. Lake and Schaffer³⁴ have discussed issues of gender and the contradictions inherent within the soldier settlement and bush cultures. While the popular literature suggested that the woman’s place was in the home, the realities of soldier settlement meant

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that she was more likely to be milking cows or otherwise working on the farm.

Other issues outside the parameters of this study are the impact of soldier settlement on the Koori inhabitants of the region and the specific problems faced by migrant settlers.35 However, several of the Indian Army men who came to the Coleraine district under the Australian Farms scheme36, and who were later administered by the C.S.B., are included in the discussion where appropriate.37

Finally, in the 2000s there have been suggestions that the ‘super and sub’ era was not as beneficial as previously thought.38 This debate is also outside the scope of this thesis. Superphosphate and subterranean clover were a major factor in the productivity increases that benefited soldier settlers in the 1940s and 1950s.39

*Primary Source Material.*

The majority of the primary source material utilised consists of documents held at the Public Records Office of Victoria.40 The relevant records comprise a large body of documentation, which gives a reasonably detailed coverage of the

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37 Including PROV, VPRS 748, Box 11, W. Frizzel, Wootong Vale Estate.


39 See chapters thirteen and fourteen.

40 In future referred to as the PROV.
settlers’ interaction with the successive administrating agencies. The Advances files from the Closer Settlement Board contain most of the documentary material relating to soldier settlers from the time they applied for their blocks until 1938. These files originally detailed the advances received by individual settlers but, over time, they came to include the majority of the written material concerning the men. The Advances files conclude in 1937 - 38 immediately before the revaluation of soldier settlement blocks which concluded in the latter year. The Revaluation Files contain the documentation relating to this and the majority of the material concerning soldier settlers for the succeeding years. In one sense, there are advantages in studying soldier settlement, as it would be far more difficult to do similar research on private farmers. Soldier settlement was a bureaucratic process; consequently it generated a considerable amount of accessible archival material that would not be available if the settlers’ were ‘private’ small farmers in debt to banks, stock agents or insurance companies.

For the most part, the material examined was restricted to that concerning settlers in the Hamilton Administrative District. A small sample of files from the

41 PROV, VRPS 748.

42 PROV, VRPS 5714.

43 Most of the files for soldier settlers in the Hamilton Administrative district are contained in PROV, VPRS 748. This series (Advances Files) contains the majority of the correspondence and reports on individual soldier settlers from when they went onto their blocks until the Revaluation of 1937 – 1938. The Hamilton and Horsham files are combined within the same Series. Revaluation and other miscellaneous files are found in PROV, VPRS 5714.
Geelong District was also studied to assess differences between the two regions. Since the situations faced by the settlers from the two regions were similar, it was decided to concentrate on the Hamilton District. Initially, the boxes of files were researched at random, but later a concerted attempt was made to examine settlers from specific Estates in order to identify recurring patterns. This was done with both Elderslie and Warrong, two of the biggest estates in South West Victoria. If the majority of the settlers on an estate were in financial difficulties, then it is probable that their environment was a contributing factor.

Several qualifications are necessary regarding the use of these sources. When assessing any documentary evidence it is important to question both the reasons for its generation and its reliability. The circumstances surrounding the creation of the documents in the Advances Files imposes a caveat on their uncritical use. Settlers were heavily in debt and, increasingly, in danger of forfeiting their blocks due to the depressed economic conditions during the 1920s and 1930s. Therefore, there were advantages in attempting to generate sympathy from the C.S.B., which could lead to concessions. Settlers in arrears with their instalments were unlikely to write and tell the C.S.B. if they inherited money or won a prize at the local show.

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44 The Geelong files are in PROV, VPRS 746, which with PROV, VPRS 748 cover the Western District.

45 This issue will be discussed in greater depth in chapter ten.
The files relating to soldier settlement at the Public Records Office, while comprehensive, are not easily quantifiable. There was no uniformity in the financial and physical information recorded in the inspectors’ ‘pink’ form reports which would have provided the opportunity for a greater degree of statistical analysis. These forms were filled out by the inspector every six months or, if the settler was in difficulties, with greater frequency. ‘Pink’ form reports contain balance sheets but the different recording methods of the individual inspectors have ensured that statistical analysis of the levels of debt, the relative profitability of alternative enterprises and gross margins are impossible. A number of inspectors provided a full and detailed balance sheet, while others were content with gross income and gross expenditure and no further breakdown. The settler was partially responsible as some had little or no bookkeeping skills. Therefore, most of the evidence will be presented in an analytical, as opposed to a statistical, mode. The Qualification Certificates attesting to the discharged soldier’s suitability as a farmer, and the adjustment and revaluation schedules are exceptions and will be analysed accordingly.

46 For a description of a ‘pink’ form report see Appendix One: Glossary and for a sample see Appendix Eight.

47 Gross margin = Gross revenue - Variable Cost. See Appendix One: Glossary

48 See Appendix Eight, where one settler’s excuse was that, he ‘could not remember’.

49 See Appendix One: Glossary. The procedures adopted and evidence presented to the Qualification Committee are discussed in chapter five: Methods of Selection and an Introduction to the Returned Men who took up Blocks in the Hamilton Administrative District.
There are gaps in the individual Advances Files. Where a settler failed and his block was divided between his neighbours, the original file is usually missing. However, where the block was transferred intact to another lessee, the file continues under the new name. The documents relating to the issuing of several Qualification Certificates are absent. Several files contain no documents for several years and then continue. References to previous correspondence indicate that the material originally existed. Irrespective of these qualifications, the documents in the Advances files are the best and sometimes the only way to assess the individual settler’s situation.

The inspectors’ reports, correspondence and the settlers’ financial statements contain valuable information. The files also contain numerous letters written to and from the C.S.B. These letters were usually written by the settler but on several occasions a clergyman, well-meaning friend, or neighbour interceded on his behalf. Wives normally only wrote when they were desperate and their letters provide a valuable, if incomplete, picture of the problems faced by women on soldier settlement blocks. Stock agents, shopkeepers and contractors also wrote to the C.S.B. hoping to be paid for goods delivered to, or work carried out for, soldier settlers.

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50 PROV, VPRS 748, Box 87, Michael Kelly, Korongah Estate, Mrs Kelly to C.S.B. 18.3.26. At this time Mr Kelly had been away drinking for three days continuously and she did not know where he was or what money he had with him.
One hundred and twenty individual soldier settlers’ files have been examined in
detail. Where possible the settlers’ fortunes have been followed after the
Revaluation of 1937 – 38. There is a caveat on this section of the thesis as a
significant number of settlers’ files have disappeared in the transition from the
Advances Files, which stop in 1937, to the Revaluation Files.51 The latter file
series records the settler’s progress after 1937 until he discharged his debt to the
C.S.C. While it would have been helpful to analyse more cases during the more
successful years which followed the revaluation, enough files have been located
to enable conclusions to be drawn about the settlers’ latter years.

Both the Victorian and Commonwealth governments commissioned official
inquiries into Soldier Settlement. These were a Victorian Royal Commission in
192552 and a Commonwealth inquiry into the ‘Losses due to Soldier Settlement
by Mr. Justice Pike’ in 1929.53 These documents have been examined and used
where relevant. Like other inquiries held before and since, they were appointed in
response to political pressure and their conclusions reflect the realities of the time.

51 Found in PROV, VPRS 5714.
52 Report of the Royal Commission on Soldier Settlement, 1925, Victorian Parliamentary
Papers, Government Printer, Melbourne, 1925. There were three Royal Commissioners,
including one soldier settler. (Harry Wiltshire) His Minority Report was more
sympathetic towards the settlers. However, the State Government ignored his
contribution.
53 Pike, op. cit., 1929. Mr Justice Pike was a Judge of the Land Valuation Court of New
South Wales.
The Returned Soldiers’ and Sailors’ Imperial League of Australia (R.S.S.I.L.A.) was closely involved in the soldier settlement question and had several committees specifically involved in land settlement. Anzac House, the headquarters of the RSL in Victoria has retained no records of these committees. A small amount of information on the committee’s activities has been gleaned from newspaper reports.

During the latter stages of World War Two, the Rural Reconstruction Commission, mindful of the problems inherent in the previous scheme, researched soldier settlement. The Commission then published a series of reports for discussion and to assist in planning for soldier settlement after 1945. The most useful for the purpose of this thesis is ‘The Second Report: Settlement and Employment of Returned Men on the Land’. It contains a brief review of soldier settlement after World War One and looks at the principal reasons for failure. The Commission carried out its investigations with assistance from the RSL and soldier settlers from the original scheme. They identified significant problem areas and reached sensible conclusions, which were adopted in administering the

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54 Throughout the text the abbreviation of RSL will be used for the ‘Returned Soldiers’ and Sailors’ Imperial League of Australia’.

later scheme. The success of post World War Two soldier settlement is a tribute to their endeavours.56

State and local newspapers were also useful sources. As the losses of the post World War One scheme increased, *The Age* and the *Argus* developed an increasingly cynical attitude towards soldier settlement. By the Great Depression, numerous articles condemned the accumulated losses. The editorial stance showed an inability to understand the realities of farming. Without concessions, few settlers would have survived. Country newspapers, perhaps because of their economic self-interest and greater knowledge of the circumstances of their local settlers, took a more sympathetic approach.

The *Journal of the Department of Agriculture of Victoria* was examined from its inception in 1902 to 1940. While the journal has little material specifically on soldier settlement, the content regarding different types of farming indicates the level of scientific knowledge available to the supervisors and inspectors who advised the settlers.

An extensive search of the major archival repositories has failed to reveal any significant collections of relevant private papers on soldier settlement.57 While

56 My late father was one of this latter group of settlers. He was an ex-shearer who started with no capital or managerial experience and became a successful farmer. I am currently running this, considerably enlarged, block.

57 Including the State Library of Victoria.
several soldier settlers have written the story of their experiences in other regions of Victoria, no diaries or accounts have been located from South West Victoria.\textsuperscript{58}

A small number of privately held papers have been examined; however, these are incomplete and add little to the PROV files. The length of time which has elapsed since the end of World War One has ensured that few, if any, of the original settlers are still alive. The wife of one soldier settler was interviewed but her memory was fading and she provided little new information.

The children of several soldier settlers were interviewed but their knowledge is minimal. Memory is often unreliable in the long term and it is over sixty years since the revaluation of soldier settlement blocks in 1938.\textsuperscript{59} Therefore even the children of soldier settlers, would have to be elderly to possess any relevant personal knowledge of life on a block in the 1920s and 1930s. Considerable discrepancies occur when the descendants’ stories are compared with the documentary evidence in their parents’ files. Another problem with the recollections of descendants is that those available to be interviewed are the children of successful soldier settlers. The children of unsuccessful settlers have, for the most part, disappeared from the area, or alternatively, have shown little interest in talking about their parents’ failures.


\textsuperscript{59} This was the final government assistance provided to the soldier settlers and the majority of survivors had few recorded financial problems after this date.
Thesis Organisation.

When constructing an organisational model, several approaches were considered. Margaret Kiddle has provided the most significant account of the region during the nineteenth century in *Men of Yesterday*.60 Using several collections of family records, Kiddle uses a biographical approach to describe the evolution of pastoralism in the district. Within this biographical framework, the story unfolds chronologically. This approach has merit as, like the development of pastoralism in the Western District, soldier settlement evolved over time. However a purely chronological account provides problems with continuity of argument and would necessarily be somewhat disjointed.

Monica Keneley has adopted a comparative approach in discussing ‘The pattern of change in the economy and society of the Western District of Victoria. 1890-1934’.61 Her PhD study is divided into three main sections. The first part describes the economic and social situation in the 1890s. The second analyses the forces that influenced the changes that occurred after 1890, while the third section analyses the impact of those later changes. Her methodology enables an analysis of the changes that occurred over time. This periodic method also had appeal as far-reaching changes in the social and economic lives of soldier settlers occurred between 1920 and 1938. However, the changes that occurred were linear and it

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60 Kiddle, *op. cit.*, 1961.

would be difficult to isolate two or three decisive points in time for comparative purposes.

Another historian to examine rural Victoria is Lionel Frost who has adopted a thematic approach. He systematically builds up a picture of the agricultural changes that took place in Victoria between 1889 and 1914 and assesses the contribution of the Victorian government to these changes.62 Chapters focus on the railway construction boom, irrigation, wheat growing and dairying. Then, having established the critical areas of agricultural change, he examines the influence of closer settlement, concluding that although government policies in the 1900s sought to encourage the creation of smallholdings, private developments were moving in the opposite direction.63 This approach also has merit in formulating an organisational model but the importance of the passage of time in the understanding of soldier settlement necessitates at least a partially chronological framework.

It has been decided to integrate a chronological and thematic approach in this study. While discussion will primarily follow chronological lines, certain chapters discuss specific themes, including the high incidence of animal mortality, dairying and improving soil fertility.

63 ibid., p. 305.
The thesis has been divided into four main sections. The first section consists of three general chapters, including this introduction, a chapter providing a short review of the relevant literature and a third examining the changing perceptions towards returned men in Australia, particularly those who became soldier settlers.

Section Two, Claiming their Reward, focuses on time and place. The first chapter analyses the reasons why soldier settlement was chosen as a major form of repatriation and, more specifically, why the Hamilton region was selected for soldier settlement.\textsuperscript{64} The second will address the methods by which the successful applicants for soldier settlement blocks were chosen and provide a profile of these men.\textsuperscript{65}

Section Three, The Reward goes Sour, concentrates on physical aspects of soldier settlement. It commences with a chapter examining the first years on the block during the initial ‘free’ period.\textsuperscript{66} It analyses why the settlers’ initial optimism rapidly declined, the problems which occurred in the early years, and the reasons why the first soldier settlers left their blocks. The second chapter discusses the increased animal pathology, which resulted from intensive farming on small

\textsuperscript{64} Chapter four: The Reasons for Soldier Settlement as a Significant Form of Repatriation after World War One.

\textsuperscript{65} Chapter five: Methods of Selection and a Profile of the Men who took up Blocks in the Hamilton Administrative District.

\textsuperscript{66} Chapter six: The First Years on the Blocks.
blocks and was a significant cause of financial loss. The third chapter discusses relevant factors in the history of farming in the Western District to outline the physical environment on the blocks. It also examines the related issues of superphosphate and pasture improvement and whether the expenditure was justified given depressed commodity prices and waterlogged blocks. The fourth chapter in this section uses dairying as a case study to illustrate the difficulties settlers had farming profitably on under-developed blocks. The final chapter in section three will address the mid to late 1920s in which there was a change in community perceptions towards soldier settlement. This was probably the most difficult time for the settlers as they faced increasing debt, worsening health and the knowledge that a substantial section of the community considered that their problems were caused by their own ineptitude. From their exalted status as war heroes, soldier settlers’ status declined rapidly and they were seen as failures whose survival necessitated an increasing drain on scarce public resource. While it became increasingly expensive to keep the settlers on their blocks, it will be argued that their inability to succeed was not necessarily their own fault.

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67 Chapter seven: Animal Mortality on Soldier Settlement Blocks.
68 Chapter eight: Superphosphate and Pasture Development.
69 Chapter nine: Maximising Profits Without Considering the Consequences. Soldier Settlers as Dairy Farmers.
70 Chapter ten: The Settlers’ Interaction with the Administration.
71 F. W. Eggleston, ‘Cleaning up the closer settlement mess’, The Herald, 29.1.1932. ‘The scheme is simply drifting downhill, a millstone around our necks, and if not remedied it may possibly produce a collapse in State finance.’
Section Four, The Reward Gets Reassessed, examines the influence of the Great Depression and the following years on the prospects of the settlers. Chapter eleven analyses the Depression and the increasingly unsympathetic ideological rhetoric of politicians and the administration.\textsuperscript{72} In this section, the emphasis changes, from the environmental and physical aspects of soldier settlement, to the policy changes, which commenced in 1932. The changes instigated by the Closer Settlement Commission acknowledged the environmental and physical factors which had kept settlers in a marginal financial state and were able to place the men in a sound financial position. In chapter twelve, the C.S.C.’s initial policies are analysed.\textsuperscript{73} Chapter thirteen addresses the revaluation of soldier settlement blocks that took place in 1937.\textsuperscript{74} Finally, the period that followed, before the settler sold out or paid off his block, will be examined.

While this thesis is only concerned with one region of rural Victoria, the problems faced by these men were mirrored elsewhere. Commodity prices were generally depressed during the 1920s and 1930s. Soldier settlement blocks throughout the state were uneconomically small. The majority of settlers were inexperienced, in poor health and had insufficient assets. Historians and commentators have

\textsuperscript{72} Chapter eleven: The Great Depression. Efficiency will Save the Day - Triers Have to Go.

\textsuperscript{73} Chapter twelve: The Era of ‘Brutality’. The Work of the Closer Settlement Commission, A Better than Expected Outcome for Soldier Settlers.

\textsuperscript{74} Chapter thirteen: A Pyrrhic Victory, Settlers Vindicated. (The revaluation was the final administrative initiative of the C.S.C.)
regarded soldier settlement after World War One as a failure.\textsuperscript{75} It will be argued that, under the difficult physical and economic circumstances of the 1920s and 1930s, when approximately half the soldier settlers throughout Victoria were still in occupation in 1938, the term ‘failure’ must be qualified.

This thesis seeks to provide deeper insight into the success or failure of soldier settlers in the Western District of Victoria and the reasons why a majority of settlers were able to succeed while others, with similar experience, capital and land, failed. The next chapter addresses the relevant literature and identifies where this work fits within the historiography of the subject and the region.

\textsuperscript{75} Lake, \textit{op. cit.}, 1987.
Chapter Two

Literature Review

History is the long struggle of man, by the exercise of his reason, to understand his environment and act upon it.

E. H. Carr.¹

There has been political and economic involvement in land settlement, and more specifically closer settlement, since colonial times. Reflecting the values of the time, Ernest Scott argued in his introduction to S. H. Roberts’ *History of Australian Land Settlement, 1788 – 1920* in 1924, that ‘It [land settlement] is the fundamental subject in Australian History’.² A considerable amount of research has been carried out into various aspects of Western District land settlement. If any work has encapsulated general perceptions of the nineteenth century history of the region, it is *Men of Yesterday: A Social History of the Western District of Victoria 1834-1890* by Margaret Kiddle.³ She examines the history of the pastoralists and their influence on regional and national development. To Kiddle, the history of the Western District was the history of pastoralism. The other major historical work, on the nineteenth century, is *The Public Lands of Australia Felix* by the geographer, J. M. Powell who has examined the Selection Acts in considerable detail, once again from a pastoral, as opposed to a small farming

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perspective. J. M. Watson has examined the impact of the various Selection Acts on the Hamilton district in ‘Selectors and squatters in the Hamilton district in the 1860’s’, an unpublished MA thesis.

Kiddle concludes that the ‘passing of the first generation of pioneers marked the end of the first era of Australian history’. The ‘sunlit afternoon’ was over and the cries to ‘unlock the lands’ had been heeded. Reflecting this transition, the focus of historical research on the Western District in the twentieth century shifted from the pastoralists to closer settlement. As farming techniques and productivity improved, farming became an increasingly capital-intensive business. The remaining pastoralists were able to dispose of the less productive portions of their land and, through the judicious use of the revenue, increase their production. This increased production led to injudicious expectations as to the ability of the Western District to support closer settlement. This later era of closer settlement has been assessed by J. D. Whelan in ‘Families and farms: Closer settlement in Victoria, 1898-1918’.

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7 ibid., Part Three.
The ‘failure’ of soldier settlement after World War One has been emphasised by historians including Marilyn Lake. However, it was a major social experiment which had a profound effect on the participants, the regional communities in which they settled and the physical environment of rural Victoria. Soldier settlement became part of a long-term movement towards closer settlement in the Western District and it became a significant factor in defining the type of society that grew up in the region during the twentieth century. As Whelan concludes, while settlers’ farms increased in size, there was ‘no return to the paddocks of the 1890s … the farms have remained’.10

While useful research has been carried out into soldier settlement and the history of small farming in Victoria, other facets need further attention. This chapter will critically examine this previous research. Works by Cherry and Brady which emphasised the positive aspects of small farming in 1913 and 1918 respectively will be discussed first as these illustrate the ‘Australia Unlimited’ ideology. The historical literature written during the era of soldier settlement will be analysed next, followed by a review of contemporary research.

Thomas Cherry had previously been Director of Agriculture for the State of Victoria and in 1913 was Professor of Agriculture at the University of Melbourne when he wrote Victorian Agriculture.11 He describes South West Victoria as

10 ibid, p. 299.
11 Cherry, op. cit., 1913.
closer settlement country’ with ‘bounteous rainfall and abundant resources’. Cherry concluded that there ‘is work for the hands and employment for the brains of many thousands more families in Victoria and every month of honest toil is certain to receive its reward’. Like Prime Minister Stanley Melbourne Bruce in the 1920s, he reflected the ruling ideology that gave Australia a major role as a primary producer within the British Empire. Cherry saw settlement in terms of the Empire believing that Australia’s ‘greatest destiny lies in providing homes where the highest type of men, women and children may carry to a fuller fruition the highest traditions of the empire’.

Cherry took an optimistic view of the prospects for the rural sector when he called for increased closer settlement. The journalist and writer E. J. Brady was even more extravagant in his praise for ‘Australia Unlimited’. He noted that ‘The whole continent has proved to be a vast storehouse of mainly undeveloped wealth’. Brady described the country around Casterton as follows:

Trucks filled with fat stock go down the rails, boxes of butter await shipment at the sidings and polished cream cans rattle toward the factories. Agricultural

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12 See chapter four for a discussion of what constituted ‘Closer Settlement Country’.
13 Cherry, op. cit., 1913, p. 85.
14 ibid, p. 288.
16 ibid.
17 E. J. Brady, Australia Unlimited, George Robertson and Co, Melbourne, 1918.
18 ibid., p. 14.
prosperity is evident, even in the slowness of the trains, which stop to pick up trucks of livestock, bags of potatoes, and leave ‘empties’ at each station.\textsuperscript{19}

He concluded that ‘Victoria’s future progress largely depends on the extent to which her agricultural resources are utilised and developed’.\textsuperscript{20} Writers like Cherry and Brady provided unduly optimistic opinions of the prospects for closer settlement. Soldier settlement would show just how unrealistic their views had been.

Several interwar historians assessed soldier settlement and its place in Australia’s postwar development including Stephen Roberts, Keith Hancock, the research student L. J. Pryor, and the politician, diplomat and research student F. W. Eggleston. Initially a majority of politicians and a significant percentage of the population thought that soldier settlement was a sound proposition. This was the era of the ‘Australia Unlimited’ philosophy and the related idea that science had solved the problems limiting intensive land use. The optimism of Cherry and Brady was still reflected in histories written in the 1920s, which gave an unrealistic picture of the scheme. Stephen Roberts in his \textit{History of Australian Land Settlement, 1788 – 1920}, published in 1924, saw soldier settlement as ‘satisfactory’. Roberts concluded that ‘So successful was the principle of this soldier settlement that recent observers have urged its extension to the lands of Europe’."\textsuperscript{21} This was an unperceptive conclusion, as it was becoming apparent as

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{19} \textit{ibid.}, p. 331.
  \item \textsuperscript{20} \textit{ibid.}, p. 367.
  \item \textsuperscript{21} Roberts, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 411.
\end{itemize}
early as 1921 that a significant number of soldier settlers were unlikely to succeed
due to financial difficulties. While Roberts’ conclusions are not supported by later
research, he correctly places soldier settlement within an Australian tradition of
encouraging rural development dating from the land grants to officers in the early
days of the settlement of Australia.22

By 1930, the more critical analysis of Keith Hancock had superseded the previous
optimism. Hancock concluded that ‘many of the schemes have appeared to be so
generous that they have attracted men with no real enthusiasm or aptitude for
farming’.23 The rapid downturn in the economic prospects for rural commodities
coupled with the heavy stock losses would have removed the ‘enthusiasm’ of any
soldier settler. Hancock felt that the government did not have ‘the courage to be
brutal’. This terminology was similar to that being expressed by

Nationalist/Country Party politicians in the Victorian parliament. Hancock made
the positive comment that soldier settlement had ‘put on the land nearly 15,000
settlers - with their dependants about 50,000 souls’.24 One important question was
not asked, and has rarely been considered since: what was the realistic alternative
for these ‘50,000 souls’? While propositions for cooperative factories and other
repatriation measures for returned men were suggested, they failed to appeal to
the public imagination to the same degree as soldier settlement.

22 ibid., pp. 409-410.
23 W. K. Hancock, Australia, Ernest Benn, London, 1930, p 115.
24 ibid.
The above authors showed a limited understanding of the growing problems affecting soldier settlement. However, other researchers writing during the worst years of the scheme were able to critically analyse the issues. L. J. Pryor, a research student at the University of Melbourne, has documented the steps leading to the formulation of Australia's repatriation policy in ‘The origins of Australia's repatriation policy, 1914-1930’.25 He considered that Australia tried to do too much with soldier settlement,26 concluding that it would have been better to do less and do it more economically:

The administration of soldier settlement may have been just and efficient but one is forced to the conclusion that either they did not know enough about their own subject or that they were subjected to political pressure. They failed to discover all the implications of Closer Settlement, they did not make provision for the contingencies which might arise ... they paid too little attention to the home maintenance principle. Moreover they were deluded by that most elusive of all things economic - land values.27

This perceptive passage elucidates the problems caused by the speed with which soldier settlement was planned and implemented. Pryor also makes insightful comments on the political climate under which soldier settlement was established

26 ibid., p. 269.
27 ibid.
and acknowledges that large number of settlers had physical and mental
disabilities.\textsuperscript{28}

Another writer to provide perceptive scholarly analysis of the effects of closer
settlement policies during the 1920s and 1930s was F. W. Eggleston\textsuperscript{29} in \textit{State
Socialism in Victoria}. In 1932, he was critical of the soldier settlement scheme,
considering that:

\begin{quote}
The settlement of men without Capital on the land is a matter of almost
impossible difficulty; especially if the Capital required is large. In these cases
the investment is uneconomic in character - the risks are outside limits of
banking risks - no bank would give the credit the C.S.B. gave to its soldier settlers.\textsuperscript{30}
\end{quote}

Eggleston was right, but soldier settlement was a political scheme and not
planned purely on economic lines. The C.S.B. was directly answerable to
Parliament and its initial liberal provision of credit led to unsustainable
indebtedness for many of the recipients. Politicians were keen to help their
constituents and the Board were forced to compromise.

Recent academic studies to examine aspects of soldier settlement in Victoria
include works by M. Keneley, M. Lake, J. M. Powell, K. Fedorowich, M.
Fletcher and L. G. Lomas. ‘The pattern of change in the economy and society of

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{28} \textit{ibid.}, p. 8.
\item \textsuperscript{29} F. W. Eggleston was Attorney General and Minister for Railways in the Allan-Peacock
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
the Western District of Victoria, 1890-1934’, the PhD study by Monica Keneley, bridges the two eras of pastoralism and soldier settlement. Keneley has examined the economic development of the region after 1880, concluding that government attempts to encourage closer settlement were largely unsuccessful. Constraints on these attempts included the physiography of the land and the unstable nature of agricultural markets, both factors which would later affect soldier settlers. She analyses the effects of soldier settlement on the graziers who sold parts of their runs to the C.S.B. and notes that the scheme provided them with an opportunity to dispose of the least productive portions of their properties and use the money to improve the remaining land.

*The Limits of Hope* by Marilyn Lake provides a wide-ranging study of soldier settlement in Victoria after World War One on a state wide basis. She seeks to use a ‘total’ view of history as expounded by Hobsbawn in which ‘… domestic life, economy, party politics, ideology, language and the work process are all interrelated’. Lake sees soldier settlement in terms of the exercise of power and the conflict between competing groups and ideologies. The power and conflict are analysed in political, bureaucratic and gender terms.

One criticism of Lake’s work is temporal. It concerns her decision to stop at 1938 when the Revaluation was completed and the C.S.C. was wound up. This termination means that effectively the last, and ultimately most useful, concessions granted to soldier settlers cannot be analysed. Another substantial issue is that the five-year term of the Closer Settlement Commission is covered in three pages. This is a pity because, if it is conceded that considerable administrative faults occurred with soldier settlement from its inception then, the most successful changes in the scheme deserve more detailed treatment. An appreciation of the importance of the changes in policy instituted by the C.S.C. is essential to any study of soldier settlement. Following the settlers’ fortunes through the post 1938 period allows a more complete evaluation of soldier settlement in Victoria. One important area in which this thesis will extend the analysis provided by Lake is by providing a detailed examination of the five-year period of the C.S.C. and the following years.

Lake has provided a good overview of the early years of the soldier settlement scheme and insight into the political and legislative processes involved. The Limits of Hope is a broadly based study, which, by its nature, is unable to examine soldier settlement on an Estate-by-Estate basis. This macro approach provides

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comparisons between different regions in the state and looks closely at the reasons for emphasising soldier settlement as the main method of repatriation.\textsuperscript{36} Lake sees the settlers as ‘victims’ of the final failed attempts ‘to establish a yeomanry’.\textsuperscript{37} She tends to down play the achievements of the sizeable minority who were able to retain possession of their blocks and take advantage of the concessions available during the 1930s. Lake concludes that after soldier settlement, ‘rural industry would be reconstructed, but on an unashamedly capitalistic basis’.\textsuperscript{38} As Lake observes, the post World War Two soldier settlers were established on properties designed to provide a reasonable standard of living. She notes that ‘His “economic” farm was ‘expressly designed to establish him as a minor capitalist, not to make him a peasant, however bold’.\textsuperscript{39} Lake is critical of the concept of the ‘family’ or ‘one man’ farm.\textsuperscript{40} This is contradictory as the majority of World War Two soldier settlement blocks were family farms on which the settler, and sometimes his wife, provided the majority of the labour.

\textsuperscript{36} While not its literal meaning, the term ‘repatriation’ is generally used to describe the schemes developed to assist returned servicemen. For a description of the origins of the word in this context see C. Lloyd and J. Rees, \textit{The Last Shilling, A History of Repatriation in Australia}, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1994, p. 1 - 4.

\textsuperscript{37} Lake, \textit{op. cit.}, 1987, pp. 238 – 239.

\textsuperscript{38} \textit{ibid.}, p. 238.

\textsuperscript{39} \textit{ibid.}, p. 239. Lake is quoting from T. P. Field. \textit{Post-war Land Settlement in Western Australia}, Kentucky University Press, Lexington, 1963, p. 55.

\textsuperscript{40} \textit{ibid.}
J. M. Powell has examined soldier settlement as part of an ongoing study of land allocation, reform and closer settlement in Victoria. He provides considerable insight into Victorian land settlement from the perspective of a historical geographer. In ‘The Debt of Honour: Soldier Settlement in the Dominions, 1915-1940’, Powell has produced a comparative assessment of soldier settlement in Australia, Canada and New Zealand and has analysed the usually accepted reasons for the ‘failure’ of soldier settlement. In ‘The Mapping of Soldier Settlement: A Note for Victoria, 1917-29’, data has been used from the 1927 Annual Report of the C.S.B. to examine the location of settlers, the size of holdings and the ‘intensification’ of settlement by municipality. Powell concludes with an analysis of the level of forfeiture per municipal area, suggesting that there could be a superficial correlation between the level of forfeiture and the size of the allotments but conceding the need for future research. This thesis will show that the quality of the land was more important than the acreage. Almost all the blocks were too small.


Kent Fedorowich has examined soldier settlement within the British Empire in *Unfit for Heroes: Reconstruction and Soldier Settlement in the Empire between the War*. His primary focus has been the resettlement of British ex-servicemen throughout the dominions after World War One but he also examines the resettlement of returned soldiers in their countries of origin. Fedorowich notes the use of soldier settlement as a form of social control and its importance within the Imperial framework. Soldier settlement schemes were adopted in various parts of the British Empire and the United States of America. While this thesis focuses on the physical problems encountered on the blocks, these problems affected both Australian and British soldier settlers.

Several regional historians have discussed soldier settlement within their wider studies. Meredith Fletcher is particularly insightful. She has examined closer settlement in the Maffra/Sale area between 1911 and 1938. Fletcher has noted the physical problems faced by Gippsland soldier settlers and has identified several

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46 *ibid.,* p. 1.


factors that affected farm profitability, which were also significant in the Western District. These included problems with the health of the settler and the animals as well as the flooding and waterlogging of the blocks. She concludes that, while a great deal has been made of the fact that settlers had insufficient capital, what the capital was actually spent on was more important and the quality of the land was critical. Fletcher notes that the

consolidated debt the settlers accumulated by 1937 did not reflect the level of their starting capital. Rather the consolidated debt reflected the nature of their blocks.49

A similar attitude to the absence of capital also occurred in the Hamilton region and it will be argued that there was considerable benefit to be gained from having a high level of debt.50 In a similar approach to that taken in this study, Fletcher has looked at soldier settlement from the perspective of the farming situation.

Les Lomas has examined social, economic and political aspects of soldier settlement throughout the Western District, from its inception to 1927, in his PhD thesis ‘Western district farmers, 1914 - 1927’.51 He has paid considerable attention to the political movements of the era, and the interaction of farmers and graziers with the political process, at both the state and local level. It is not

49 ibid., p. 176.
50 See chapter ten: The Settlers’ Interaction with the Administration.
proposed to examine the political situation in detail in this thesis except where it
directly influenced the fortunes of the soldier settlers.

John Senyard has researched the farming community of the Walpeup Shire in the
Mallee during the 1930s.\textsuperscript{52} Senyard has identified declining prices, drought and
the changing nature of the Mallee environment as key factors in the failure of the
soldier settlers. Both the Fletcher and Senyard studies identified inhospitable and
changing environments as important factors in the success or failure of the settlers
involved. Similarly, in the Hamilton region the environment had a considerable
effect on the profitability of the settlers. As will be argued later, while South West
Victoria was more hospitable than the Mallee, it was not necessarily ‘fortunate’ to
be allocated a block on an estate in the Hamilton Administrative District.

Other writers to consider soldier settlement as part of more general studies
include Bruce Davidson and Stephen Garton. Davidson, an agricultural
economist, has studied Australian farming, including soldier settlement, from an
economic perspective.\textsuperscript{53} He uses gross margin analysis\textsuperscript{54} to examine the
profitability of various farming enterprises both before and during the life of the

\textsuperscript{52} J. A. Senyard, A Mallee farming community in the Depression, the Walpeup Shire in

\textsuperscript{53} B. R. Davidson, European Farming in Australia: An Economic History of Australian
Farming, Elsevier, Amsterdam, 1981.

\textsuperscript{54} The Gross margin equals Gross revenue minus Variable Cost. (In the short term,
increasing the size of the farm enterprise, providing the additional gross returns from this
expansion exceed the variable costs associated with it can increase farm profits.)
scheme. Davidson considers that the large number of settlers relying entirely on borrowed money had no hope of succeeding in any type of farming with the exception of dairying. The latter received monthly milk cheques and did not have the initial disadvantage of waiting a whole year or more before they received any income. This thesis will show that, initially, success in dairy farming was not necessarily assured. Davidson’s economic analysis shows that, during the 1920s and 1930s, the majority of farmers were finding profitability elusive. High debt levels and lack of financial reserves exacerbated the position of soldier settlers.

Stephen Garton has examined the wider field of the overall repatriation of returned soldiers in The Cost of War, Australians Return. He compares and contrasts the experiences of returned soldiers from the First and Second World Wars and the Vietnam War. Garton has examined the effects of war on the participants. In a chapter on soldier settlement, he provides considerable insight into the fragile mental condition of the returnees, including those shell-shocked in World War One. Research for this study indicates that several shell-shocked men became soldier settlers in the Hamilton region. While these were able to provide a convincing performance before the Qualification Committee, when placed in

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isolation on their blocks, the fragility of their physical and mental state soon became apparent.

More specific local studies include works by Peter Yule and Max Neale. *From Forest, Swamp and Stones: A History of the Shire of Minhamite* by Yule analyses the influence of soldier settlement on the shire.\(^58\) Minhamite had a heavy influx of soldier settlers who suffered badly during the Depression. The settlers’ troubles affected the whole shire as their inability to pay their rates helped create a substantial level of indebtedness. Irrespective of this, Yule concludes that, locally the scheme was a success as ‘The absentee and frequently incompetent owners of the large estates were replaced by farmers who were, in the main, able, efficient and hard working’.\(^59\) This transition was not restricted to the Minhamite Shire and the productive capacity of South West Victoria increased, in the long term, with the establishment of soldier settlement in the region.

On Elderslie in the far west of the state, a whole district grew up round the Estate.\(^60\) In effect, the district would not exist without soldier settlement. Elderslie Estate originally contained thirty-five settlers and Max Neale in *Redgums and Hard Yacca* has sympathetically told their story.\(^61\) This local history is prepared

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\(^{59}\) *ibid.*, p. 116.

\(^{60}\) This has become known as Langkoop.

\(^{61}\) M. Neale, *Red Gums and Hard Yacca*, Copyright the Author, printed by Exchange Printers, Mount Gambier, S.A. 1984. He has used Wally Douglas’ correspondence files (currently in his possession) extensively as a source.
to acknowledge the importance of soldier settlement and does not attempt to romanticise the struggles of the settlers. Neale's work contrasts with several local histories that fail to acknowledge that soldier settlement even existed.

In other regional histories, the treatment of soldier settlement varies. Soldier settlement has been given scant attention in many local and regional histories. However, numerous districts were substantially changed by the breaking up of large and medium sized estates and the settling of large numbers of returned men in the surrounding area.

This was not always enough to get soldier settlement into town histories. *Hamilton, A Western District History* by Don Garden included material on the hinterland in coverage of the nineteenth century. By the 1920s, the author was concentrating his attention upon the town itself and soldier settlement is not discussed. One explanation for this change in emphasis from the heroic study of the pioneers to the history of the civic leaders of the town in local histories is that the local shire council or similar civic body often commissioned books to commemorate a milestone in the town’s history. The centenary of local government has been a popular occasion. Consequently, many of these volumes

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62 PROV, VPRS 748, Box 26, M. Campbell, Elderslie Estate, Lessee to C.S.B, 22.2.32.
63 These include: *Shire of Glenelg Centenary, 1863-1963, One Hundred Years of Progress, Shire of Glenelg, Casterton, 1963*, (No author cited) and *Dundas Shire Centenary, 1863-1963*, Compiled by the Hamilton Spectator for the Dundas Shire Council, Hamilton, 1963. (No author cited.)
have become the history of local government as well as the history of the local institutions including the schools, hospitals and sporting bodies. The perception of ‘failure’, which has persisted with reference to soldier settlement, is unlikely to have a place in a celebratory history. The *Shire of Glenelg Centenary, 1863-1963, One Hundred Years of Progress* illustrates the point.⁶⁵ The perceived failure of soldier settlement would seem out of place in ‘One Hundred Years of Progress’.

One of the most significant works on farming and social history relating to rural Victoria is ‘Victorian Agriculture and the Role of Government: 1880-1914’ by L. E. Frost, which covers a period of economic and social transformation.⁶⁶ He analyses the considerable changes that took place in technology and farm management after 1890. While Frost has not carried out ‘detailed research’⁶⁷ on soldier settlement and agriculture during the 1920s and 1930s, he examines the technological changes which occurred in dairying and wheat growing during the early years of the twentieth century. Frost also analyses the ruling ideological viewpoint that was in place before the establishment of the scheme.

Previous research into soldier settlement, as well as the nature of the available research material, has helped to define the limits of this research. The physical aspects of soldier settlement have been inadequately analysed in the past. Another

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⁶⁵ *Shire of Glenelg Centenary, 1863-1963, One Hundred Years of Progress*, op. cit., 1963.
⁶⁷ *ibid.*, p. 276.
important aspect of the scheme concerns the role of the Closer Settlement Commission which has been almost ignored by several researchers. This thesis endeavours to redress these omissions, with particular reference to South West Victoria.

Not every book or journal article that deals with soldier settlement, either in the region or on a state wide basis, has been examined in this chapter. Other works will be used where appropriate throughout the text. The next chapter will look at the considerable differences between the various mythologies which grew up around the men of the First AIF, in both war and peace.
Chapter Three

The Social Context: The Dichotomy between the Myth and the Reality of Soldier Settlement

we’ve come through without a scratch; and if our luck holds, we’ll keep moving out of one bloody misery into another, until we break, see, until we break.

F. Manning, *The Middle Parts of Fortune*.1

Introduction

To help place this study within its social and ideological context the dichotomy between the myths that emerged regarding the men of the First AIF and the reality that existed on soldier settlement blocks will be addressed. For much of the history of soldier settlement the community idolisation of heroic returned soldiers sat uneasily beside the condemnation accorded failing soldier settlers. While returned men were eulogised on ANZAC Day, those who became settlers were treated somewhat differently during the rest of the year. As the losses of the scheme mounted, a perception arose that they were wastrels whose inability to meet their commitments was due to their personal failings. This chapter will endeavour to address the reasons for the original heroic status of the men, why the status declined and why, with the passing of time, this status has been restored.

The Origin of the Myth

Much of the heroic status enjoyed by returned soldiers originated in the despatches of C. E. W. Bean, Australia’s official historian of World War One.

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1 F. Manning, *The Middle Parts of Fortune*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 2000, p. 4. (Originally published anonymously in 1930 as *Her Privates We*)
These wartime writings helped to create a false impression of the men who would later become soldier settlers. Bean described the character of the men in terms of ‘bush’ characteristics. Gerster in Big-Noting comments on the growth of the ‘bushman-warrior’ legend, considering that The Anzac Book, a compilation of stories by soldiers at the front, was a powerful force in creating the ANZAC legend. This, and other wartime literature, created a picture of the First World War digger as a superman from the bush. In The Anzac Book a piece entitled ‘Anzac Types’ profiled this stereotypical Australian personality. This was ‘Wallaby Joe’ whose appearance suggested the typical bushman. He had ridden nearly a thousand miles to enlist and was described as ‘A horseman from head to toe and a dead shot’. Lloyd Robson has queried Bean’s assertion as to the strength of the ‘bush’ characteristics of the First AIF. He suggests that, although the official historian cannot show that the number of rural recruits was
substantial, Bean raised the ‘bush’ recruit to semi-mythical status as a fighter. Robson’s figures show that only 13.07 per cent of Victorian recruits were from occupations associated with primary production. The majority came from the towns and cities.\textsuperscript{10} However, in fairness to Bean, a significant proportion of the soldier settlers in South West Victoria came from this 13.07 per cent.\textsuperscript{11} A number of contemporary writers believed that it was left to the ‘bushman to provide the force with its backbone, its iron will and its iron fibre’.\textsuperscript{12} Serle noted that the Australian soldier was ‘a new version of the bushman’ thus providing some continuity between the early pioneers, ‘diggers’ and soldier settlers.\textsuperscript{13} It could be argued that the formulators of the soldier settlement schemes had the ‘bushman warrior’ in mind as the ideal soldier settler.\textsuperscript{14}

Typical Returned Soldiers

The typical returned soldier bore little resemblance to the archetypal ‘Anzac’.

During the war about 123,000 men were seriously wounded at least once, 16,000

\textsuperscript{10} ibid., p. 745.

\textsuperscript{11} See Table 6.3. In this example, approximately seventy-five per cent of eighty-two settlers on three estates near Coleraine came from the Western District. On Warrong Estate, forty-two of the original fifty-five settlers came from the region. Warrnambool Standard, 20.9.20.

\textsuperscript{12} Gerster, \textit{op. cit.}, 1987, p. 54.


\textsuperscript{14} This may not be precisely correct. Writers could have been extolling the virtues of the ‘digger’ to placate the civilians at home and to encourage recruiting. As Gerster, \textit{op. cit.}, 1987, shows there was much romanticising of the virtues of the First AIF.
were gassed and 1,600 were diagnosed as being ‘shell shocked’ or similar.\textsuperscript{15}

There were 427,000 reports of sickness and 3,600 non-battle injuries. Out of approximately 270,000 returnees, 73,000 were already on pensions by 1919 and that number had grown to 90,000 by 1920.\textsuperscript{16}

As would be expected from these statistics, the young men who enlisted were often very different to the men who returned. In 1926, Mrs Rubena Kelly, the wife of an alcoholic soldier settler from Korongah Estate near Warrnambool, wrote to the C.S.B. on behalf of her husband. ‘I feel sorry for the returned soldiers. … I think the soldiers are to be pitied, there must be something wrong somewhere or they would not be like they are.’\textsuperscript{17}

In 1917, Mr Angas MLA told the Legislative Assembly that ‘We must realise that these men come back with less strength than they had when they went away, that they are restless, that their nerves are shattered’.\textsuperscript{18} Similarly, Sir Neville Howse V. C., in a speech made in Federal Parliament in 1924, noted that

\textsuperscript{15} C. Wilcox, and J. Aldridge, (eds) \textit{The Great War: Gains and Losses – ANZAC and Empire}, Australian War Memorial and Australian National University, Canberra, 1995, p. 180. This was in addition to 60,000 men killed. The number of ‘’shell shocked’ men is likely to be understated as little was known about war trauma at that time. See Garton, \textit{op. cit.}, 1996, for more information. 417,000 men and women voluntarily enlisted in the Australian forces and 330,000 of these served overseas. Ian Turner ‘1914–1918’ in F. Crowley, (ed) \textit{A New History of Australia}, William Heinemann, Melbourne, 1974. p. 348.

\textsuperscript{16} \textit{ibid.},

\textsuperscript{17} PROV, VPRS 748, Box 7, Michael Kelly, Korongah Estate, Mrs Kelly to C.S.B., 18.3.26.

\textsuperscript{18} Mr Angas, MLA, \textit{VPD}, 21.8.17, p. 1,003.
The mental state of any of us who went through those dreadful years is not exactly normal. Whilst I may not observe abnormality in myself, I notice it in others who were at the war; they are not as they were before undergoing that experience.\textsuperscript{19}

Howse had been Director of Medical Services for the AIF, and was responsible for the medical administration of all Australian troops in England, France and Egypt. He would thus, have a professional understanding of the mental condition of returned soldiers. In addition, there was a perception that returned soldiers were dying prematurely in the 1920s.\textsuperscript{20} With the large number of returned men who were, at least partially, physically or mentally disabled, there is a strong probability that this did occur. As noted above the majority had never been the legendary ‘heroic bushmen’ of popular literature in the first place.\textsuperscript{21} When they were discharged, a significant number were in poor physical and mental health.

\textbf{Changing Perceptions}

While it has been forgotten in the resurgence of interest in the men of the First AIF,\textsuperscript{22} not everyone saw the returned soldiers as ‘heroes’ who should be liberally provided for.\textsuperscript{23} Garton has identified the ‘lingering bitterness from the anti-

\begin{figure}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{20} Sturrock, \textit{op. cit.}, 1992, p. 183.
\item \textsuperscript{23} Garton, \textit{op. cit.}, 1996, p. 11.
\end{itemize}
\end{figure}
conscription campaigns’ and the jealousy regarding soldier repatriation benefits.24

Ian Turner has noted the idea of the ‘ashes of victory’, a sentiment many soldier settlers would come to know well.25 After what they had endured during the conflict, returned men expected better on their return to Australia. For at least one settler on Elderslie estate, the heroic gloss wore off quickly. Murdoch Campbell had been looking for land since August 1919 and in 1920 wrote to the C.S.B. that:

I have spent £70 - £80 looking at places and trying to get agents to submit places, in fact it is getting now that one wants to take off his soldier’s badge before he goes into an agent’s office if one wants to get a hearing.26

Undercurrents of antagonism existed amid the general euphoria which greeted the returning ‘heroes’. Garton makes the point that, as late as 1938, few returned servicemen were prepared to wear their veteran’s badges in public.27 Men who had, for a variety of reasons, stayed at home begrudged the attention paid to returned soldiers. In later years, others who had been too young to enlist grew to resent the perception that ex-soldiers gained special privileges. Gammage has suggested that non-participants ‘wanted a return to normality, and they expected returned men to show a similar desire’.28 This was often impossible for men

24 ibid.
26 PROV, VPRS 748, Box 26, M. Campbell, Elderslie Estate, Letter to C.S.B, 15.6.20.
‘bearing the burden of the lost years … and their share of the legacy of madness’.29

There was a growing sense of ambivalence towards ex-soldiers by the Australian people. The number of dead and wounded meant that there would be few families who were not mourning a loved one or knew someone who was. The depth of mourning may have aided in the fall from favour of soldier settlers. Initially, returned men would be looked up to as heroic survivors for whom ‘nothing was too good’ but later it was perceived that many did not live up to their exalted status. When they became ‘failures’ as soldier settlers, there was the opportunity to see this as defiling the memory of the loved ones lost in the conflict.

Soldiers were also ambivalent about their situation. Some had no illusions about their future prospects. As early as April 1916, a wounded soldier spoke out at a meeting of war wounded at Nancy in France. He considered that: ‘today we are welcome, but after the war no one will speak of us and work will be hard to find’.30 Gammage cites another soldier who thought that ‘Australia will be a pretty deadly place for a returned soldier after the war, until he can live down the fact of his having served his country’.31

29 ibid., p. 273.
Australia paid a terrible price for its involvement in World War One. In addition to the personal losses, the Commonwealth public debt rose from £6 million in 1914 to £325 million in 1919.\textsuperscript{32} This was largely due to Australia’s involvement in the war and the total cost had risen to £831 million by 1934.\textsuperscript{33} The losses from soldier settlement would add to this substantial war debt. Later, the legacy of debt from the conflict intensified the effects of the Great Depression.

The Australian people had been bitterly split by two conscription referendums in 1916 and 1917. In addition, they endured an increasingly authoritarian Commonwealth government during the war.\textsuperscript{34} Gammage concludes that ultimately the concept of Anzac was

\begin{quote}
  a dividing rather than a unifying experience. It separated those who had fought in the war from those who had not, and one generation of Australians from those who went before and those who went after.\textsuperscript{35}
\end{quote}

This division in the community would reinforce an increasingly vocal opposition to the economic losses attributed to soldier settlement over the next two decades.

\textsuperscript{32} Commonwealth Year Book, 1919 - 1920, p. 695. Included in this debt was £49,082 059 owed to the Imperial Government on account of War Loans and a further sum of £42,696,500 due to the British Government for the maintenance of Australian troops serving overseas. The Commonwealth Government also raised large amounts of money for the prosecution of the war, by direct application to the investing public of Australia. These Bond issues raised £213,490,810.


\textsuperscript{35} Gerster, op. cit., 1987, p. 129.
At the same time, politicians and others were proclaiming the great debt that Australia owed to its soldiers.

I appreciate and value to the fullest the great deeds done by our soldiers, and the sacrifices they have made. … We can never forget the debt we owe these men. No money manufactured in any mint in the world can repay them for the great sacrifices they have made for us.\(^\text{36}\)

It was against a background of ambivalent sentiment that Australia set out to repay the promises made to the recruits when they answered the call to arms. A well-meaning society unwittingly consigned them to a life of unremitting toil and disappointment, accompanied, in a number of cases, by premature death.\(^\text{37}\) Sadly for many returned men, they had to contend with a myth concerning the therapeutic effects of country living for wounded and ill soldiers.\(^\text{38}\) In 1921 Mr Old, MLA stated, in respect to the returned soldier, that ’so long as he has a stout heart and is willing to face the trying conditions … he should be given the greatest encouragement’.\(^\text{39}\) The life of a pioneering soldier settler was hard and, as many failed settlers could attest, it should not have been prescribed as a means of convalescence. The propaganda exercise which created the Anzac myth helped to formulate the popular view that soldier settlement was the ideal task for a returned soldier.

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Returned Soldiers: The Army Not Necessarily Good Training for Farming

Several of the problems later associated with soldier settlement can be attributed to a flawed perception of the participants. A marked contrast existed between the life of a soldier on active service and the life of a ‘single’ soldier settler. In the army, while the conditions were terrible, the men lived and died with their ‘mates’, whereas on their blocks they were alone. As early as 1917, an editorial in *The Soldier* noted that ‘after the excitement of battle and the companionship of active campaigning few will suffer the solitude of land settlement’. This initial loneliness would put considerable pressure on returned men who were in a fragile mental condition. Their inspectors disapproved of trips away from the block, especially if alcohol was involved. It could be argued that a few drinks in town with fellow settlers, to talk over their problems concerning life on the block and stemming from their war service, was therapeutic for the men concerned. Instead, ‘offending’ soldier settlers were given adverse reports. No one can ever know the mental burden which settlers carried on to their blocks. Glimpses can be seen through their letters, and those of their wives, neighbours and inspectors.

Reassessment of the Myth

In recent years, a heroic mythology has been re-kindled concerning the men of the First AIF. As the numbers have dwindled, the myths have grown. A serious

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40 Only twenty per cent of the sample studied were married when they went on to their blocks.

reassessment of the ‘myth of Anzac’ has occurred, in both the popular media\textsuperscript{42} and academic discussion.\textsuperscript{43} At the funeral of one of the last surviving Gallipoli veterans, the then Governor General of Australia, Sir William Deane, summed up the results of eighty years of Anzac myth-making as follows:

For Anzac is also about courage, and endurance, and duty and mateship, and good humour, and the survival of a sense of worth: the sum of those human and national values which our pioneers found in the raw bush of a new world for the first time at Gallipoli.\textsuperscript{44}

If there has been a resurgence of interest in the men of the First AIF and a reassessment of the meaning of Anzac, then the postwar treatment of the ‘heroes’ is also in need of reappraisal. Soldier settlers, while they needed ‘courage and endurance’, soon lost their ‘sense of worth’ during their struggles to create a home for themselves and their families. While the heroic stature of the ‘digger’ lives on in contemporary accounts of the war, there is little mention of the suffering endured in later years. This suffering was by no means restricted to soldier settlers. Other returned men faced an uncertain future after the war.\textsuperscript{45}

Gammage notes that ‘A number were installed in “steady” jobs and people

\textsuperscript{42} See the popular press, particularly in the period both before and after Anzac Day and Armistice Day.


\textsuperscript{45} Sturrock. \textit{op. cit.}, 1992, See pp. 158, 159 and 183.
wondered, and many condemned, when they did not “settle down”.\(^{46}\) Sturrock argues that a great number of returned soldiers had no chance on the open labour market because of war disabilities.\(^{47}\) A much greater percentage had to take time off from work due to sickness than non-soldiers. Duckboard, the state journal of the RSL commented in 1924 that

> The great tragedy of today is that in many instances, as soon as retrenchment commences, the returned soldier is amongst the first to be put off; there is nothing against him other than that he does a bit less than the others. … If any thought or consideration is given to the possibility of a war disability effecting the soldier’s output it is immediately sacrificed on the altar of high wages.\(^{48}\)

To further exacerbate this situation the unemployment rate in 1921 was over ten per cent.\(^{49}\) Problems faced by returned men in the wider community would affect soldier settlers to a similar if not greater, degree. Farming on a soldier settlement block was harder work than many wage earners would have to endure. As will be shown in chapter five a significant number suffered from indifferent health when they took up their blocks.


\(^{47}\) *ibid.*, p. 183.

\(^{48}\) Sturrock. *op. cit.*, 1992, p. 159. (Quotation from *Duckboard*) 15.5.1924.

Conclusion

Soldier settlement became an important part of the repatriation of the men of the First AIF. However, the settlers were victims of unrealistic perceptions about their personal abilities and what was required to be successful as farmers. The men’s struggles would be exacerbated by the knowledge that they were unjustly blamed for their own misfortune. This thesis will explore the problems faced by soldier settlers and show that even the idea that they were ‘victims’ of a failed ideology was part of the enduring mythology surrounding soldier settlement.\(^5\) In the next chapter, the reasons for the adoption of soldier settlement, both in general and in South West Victoria, will be discussed.

SECTION TWO: CLAIMING THEIR REWARD

Steps should be taken throughout the State to meet the great influx of returned soldiers at the termination of the War. This phase of the aftermath of the War will tax our resources to a greater degree than we have had any experience of.

Colonel W. Fitzpatrick

Chapter Four

Reasons for the Adoption of Soldier Settlement as a Significant Form of Repatriation

In short, this district throughout is pregnant with possibilities and it only requires settlement by soldiers and others to bring out its riches. This is a matter that concerns us all and it is ‘up to us’ all to help any movement that is calculated to bring us into our heritage, namely a larger population all round, settlement in all directions and a prosperous soldier yeomanry using Casterton, Sandford and Merino as their trading centres.

Casterton News, 1919.1

Introduction

At the conclusion of World War One, Australia’s returning soldiers faced a changing economic environment when they made the transition to civilian life. This chapter will address the background to soldier settlement with particular emphasis on two main issues. Firstly, the reasons for the introduction of soldier settlement, and secondly, why a significant number of men from the Hamilton region opted to take part.

During the war, Australia pledged to support Britain to ‘our last man and our last shilling’.2 In the early days, before the ‘illusions of heroism and sacrifice and all the ideals of warfare were shattered’, recruitment was not a problem but as the

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1 Casterton News, 4.8.1919.

casualty lists grew, the number of volunteers declined. To retain the required levels of enlistment, the Commonwealth government was forced to make promises about repatriation. Recruits were promised generous pensions and reinstatement in their old jobs, or if that proved impossible, preferential treatment in the job market. When the first men started to return from the conflict in mid-1915, it became necessary to honour these commitments or provide acceptable alternatives. It would be difficult to obtain recruits if potential soldiers saw the government reneging on its promises.

For political considerations, an early decision on repatriation was necessary. The Prime Minister, W. M. Hughes, saw the problem in economic terms, considering that

what we are face to face with is the wealth-producing power of some hundreds of thousands of men, and it is very important that we should deal with it in a satisfactory manner.

The Commonwealth and state governments were aware of the wider implications of having large numbers of unemployed and dissatisfied returned soldiers in the cities and towns. They became an increasingly troublesome presence, celebrating

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3 ibid., p. 525. As John McQuilton has noted, country regions contained a finite number of possible recruits. When these had enlisted, recruiting became very difficult. John McQuilton, Rural Australia and the Great War: from Tarrawinge to Tangambalanga, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, Vic., 2001, pp. 173 – 180.

4 There was controversy about these early returnees because, while some had been wounded in battle, and thus could be perceived to be returning heroes, others had been dishonourably discharged for misconduct and venereal diseases and it was often impossible to identify the various groups.

their return with drinking and riotous behaviour in the streets.⁶ These ex-soldiers, many of whom had been physically or mentally affected, were seen as a deterrent to recruitment. Towards the end of the war, there was turmoil and unrest in Europe culminating in the victory of the Bolshevik forces in Russia. This led to a suspicion that the men could be tempted to take the law into their own hands if they were not gainfully employed. Serious riots occurred in Melbourne during July 1919 when drunken ex-servicemen took to the streets.⁷ Something had to be done with the soldiers as quickly as possible. Soldier settlement would solve two problems; it would repatriate the men and remove them from the public arena.

Irrespective of the ambivalent attitudes towards returned men noted in chapter three, a wide section of the community believed that returned soldiers deserved a reward for their sacrifices. The Minister for Repatriation, Senator Edward Millen articulated these feelings in 1917 when he wrote that

> The whole community was moved to gratitude and stirred by a sense of justice. It was determined to do something. It was resolute that it would not incur the reproach of being cynically indifferent to the after-war welfare of the soldiers who were fighting, suffering and enduring on its behalf. It did not pause to enquire as to what that something should be. It was the sacrifice its sons were making; it proclaimed its obligation and recorded its resolve, leaving ways and means to be evolved later on.⁸

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The rural economy had been buoyant during the early years of the twentieth century and, particularly during 1914-1918, the returns from rural commodities were at historically high levels. The war years had been unusually predictable for farmers who, for once, did not have to contend with the cyclical nature of commodity prices. Wheat, wool and butter producers were guaranteed a fixed price as the Commonwealth government compulsorily acquired and marketed these commodities during the conflict. Wheat was sold at 4 shillings 8.8 pence per bushel, and wool at an average price of 15.5 pence per pound. To put these figures into historical context, in the 1913-14 financial year, wheat had been sold at 3.17 shillings per bushel and wool at an average price of 9.1 pence per pound. A guaranteed price rise of approximately twenty-five per cent for the duration of the war was a considerable help to Australia’s wheat and woolgrowers, enabling them to plan with confidence. The increase in butter prices was even more dramatic. The price went from 10.75 pence per pound in 1913-14 to 24 pence in 1920-21. These three commodities were produced in significant quantities in Victoria and the Western District.

In arriving at the decision to make soldier settlement an important element in the repatriation of the men, the abnormal circumstances influencing the high prices,

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11 *ibid.*, p. 266.
were ignored. This had been the first attempt by the Commonwealth government to regulate agricultural prices on a large scale. The success of the schemes convinced many farmers and politicians that the programs could be continued in peacetime. Supporters of the price-support mechanisms did not take into account that higher than normal prices during the war years, and immediately afterwards, were primarily caused by external factors, not government regulation.  

When planning repatriation, politicians and agricultural leaders paid insufficient attention to the cyclical nature of rural commodity prices. They convinced themselves, and more importantly the applicants for soldier settlement blocks, that the good prices would continue. Cherry wrote in 1913 that ‘Wool, wheat, lamb and butter will not drop to unprofitable rates’. He suggested that supply created demand and in the unlikely event of falling commodity price, farmers could counteract the downturn with increased production. In the past, periods of high commodity prices tended to lead to over-expansion in the profitable industries. These were usually followed by periods of recession, and there was no evidence to suggest that this cyclical trend would not continue.

13 ibid., p. 267.
14 Cherry, op. cit., 1913, p. 283.
15 ibid., p. 284.
Irrespective of this, rural development continued to be seen as the pathway to
greatness for both individuals and the country as a whole. Two prewar attitudes to
rural development re-emerged. Firstly, as the economic historian Tony Dingle has
argued, if ‘…the country was to grow it must do so by expanding rural output and
exports ... soil was seen as the source of all real wealth’.\(^{17}\) In 1913, Cherry noted
that

> the resources of this corner of the Commonwealth, if developed by a sufficient
> population, would, by their superfluity, supply most of the food requirements of
> England, but our greater destiny lies in providing homes where the highest type
> of men, women and children may carry to a fuller fruition the highest traditions
> of the English race.\(^{18}\)

Secondly, ‘Australia was a vast continent with a tiny population, which would be
vulnerable to attack unless there was more rural settlement’.\(^{19}\) Soldier settlement
would help with both defence and population growth.

Another reason for the official encouragement of soldier settlement was the long-
term population shift from the bush. Changing demographics in Victoria from the
1890s had led to an increasing number of country people moving to the cities in
search of work. In 1918, the Victorian Government appointed a Select Committee
to inquire into the causes of the drift of population from the country districts to
the city. The committee noted in its report that

\(^{17}\) T. Dingle, *The Victorians: Settling*, Fairfax, Syme and Weldon Associates, McMahon’s
Point, N.S.W., 1984, p. 180.

\(^{18}\) Cherry, *op. cit.*, 1913, p. 288.

\(^{19}\) Dingle, *op. cit.*, 1984, p. 181.
The agricultural industry is recognised by your committee as the basis of country life. It is from this industry that not only the material wealth must come, but the supply of independent and strong citizenship upon which the permanent greatness of the Nation must rest.\textsuperscript{20}

The Select Committee reported that something had to be done to arrest the drift to the cities. Despite the romanticisation of the land, the migration from all districts to the cities had amounted to 170,000 in the previous seventeen years, a number equal to the actual increase of births over deaths.\textsuperscript{21} It was felt that soldier settlement could help slow the continuing population movement and thus ensure the ‘permanent greatness of the Nation’. The perception ‘that the only real wealth came from the soil and so the size of the capital cities was evidence of a distorted and unsound economy’ was widespread.\textsuperscript{22} Lionel Frost refutes this statement concluding that the urban sector provided a ‘powerful stimulus for economic growth’.\textsuperscript{23} The State War Council\textsuperscript{24} refused to assist returned men who had previously lived in the country to move to the city, as they did not want the repatriation scheme to be used as an instrument of centralisation.\textsuperscript{25} Irrespective of this, soldier settlement was unlikely to have a long-term effect on the country.

\textsuperscript{20} Report of the Select Committee upon the Causes of the Drift of Population from Country Districts to the City, \textit{VPP}, 1918, p. 4.

\textsuperscript{21} Copland, (ed) \textit{op. cit.}, 1931, p 24.


\textsuperscript{23} \textit{ibid}, p. 42.

\textsuperscript{24} State War Councils were set up to coordinate recruiting and repatriation at a State level. Lake \textit{op. cit.}, 1987, pp. 28 – 29.

\textsuperscript{25} \textit{ibid.}, pp. 34-35.
population. By 1921, over half the population of Victoria resided in the metropolitan areas as is illustrated in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1. Victorian population distribution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Melbourne</th>
<th>Other Urban</th>
<th>Rural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>766,465</td>
<td>187,490</td>
<td>571,577</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1933</td>
<td>991,934</td>
<td>198,191</td>
<td>628,558</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The increasing capitalisation and diminishing labour requirements of farms meant that this trend continued. Pastoralism had also contributed, generating weak linkages between the large graziers and the local workers and towns. Graziers’ ability to bypass local towns and purchase their requirements in capital cities assisted the decline of country towns.

Probably the most important reason why soldier settlement became a major part of the repatriation process related to the place of agriculture in the Australian economy and the rural ideology. H. S. W. Lawson, the Premier of Victoria believed that

> All the best thinking men in the metropolitan area know ... that the real prosperity of the metropolis depends upon primary production and the success of the rural industries.

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Reasonable economic grounds existed for this view with wool at forty-four per cent, wheat at over fourteen per cent and butter at nearly five per cent of total exports between 1923-4 and 1927-8.29

The promoters of soldier settlement came from two main ideological groups. In the first group, the proponents of rural development wanted the establishment of a large class of small farmers to ensure Australia’s economic future as well as her military safety.30 The desire for development at all costs blinded them to the reality that many soldier settlers would be physically unsuitable for the task.31

The Nationalist Prime Minister S. M. Bruce told an Imperial Economic Conference in 1923 that ‘Australia’s aim above everything else is to populate her country and advance from her position of a very small people occupying a very vast territory’.32 Bruce’s imperial formulation for Australian development was expressed in terms of ‘Men, Money and Markets’. He equated development with the application of more labour and British capital to land which was seen as an ‘abundant’ resource.33 In addition, Bruce wanted guaranteed markets, preferably within the British Empire for Australian commodities While he made this speech


31 Brady, op. cit., 1918.

32 Richmond, op. cit., 1983, p. 239.

after the establishment of soldier settlement, Bruce was reiterating popular beliefs. Another ongoing theme in Australian history was the threat of the ‘yellow peril’. Successive governments looked to the north, fearing the invasion of Asians who would take over an empty continent.34 To politicians of the era there seemed no better way of filling up this, theoretically, empty continent than with soldier settlers.

The second group supported the recurring mythology of land settlement in Australia, which referred to the need for a nation of ‘sturdy yeomen’.35 The concept of the ‘yeoman’ farmer, which appealed to believers in an agrarian ideology, was a romantic ideal with medieval origin. However, its emphasis on family production and self-sufficiency had become an anachronism by the late 19th century. The idea was pre-capitalist and pre-industrial in conception and owed something to the British ‘Chartist’ movement of the eighteenth century.36 In the Australian context, ‘yeomen’ were seen as ‘exclusively small freeholders’ and the supporters of the ideal saw it as an attempt to establish a ‘capitalist society free from exploitation’.37 The ‘yeoman’ ideal helped in the encouragement of pre World War One closer settlement. In 1904, Donald MacKinnon, MLA argued that

34 D. Walker, Anxious Nation: Australia and the Rise of Asia, 1850-1939, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1999, Chapters nine and eleven.
‘There is no danger whatsoever in perpetuating the race of small freeholders as they are the best class of men we can have’.38 Similarly, in 1918, Brady noted that ‘the greater the number of agricultural proprietors, the better for the effective occupation and future development of the whole continent’.39

There remained a romantic belief in life in the bush, which had little grounding in reality. In this notion

the small farmer of Australia ... is generally a man who has started with nothing but strong arms and a stout heart, and carved out a holding for himself from the virgin bush, maintaining himself with his labour.40

Lake has pointed out that attempts to form an independent Australian ‘yeomanry’ were essentially a contradiction in terms.41 The ideal was that ‘yeomen’ should be honest, sober and hard-working, preferably with a large family to exploit.

The reality was very different for the majority of soldier settlers who, even if they were fortunate enough to have ‘strong arms and a stout heart’, soon had an insurmountable burden of debt. Australian farmers needed capital, labour and the ability to produce a profit. To speak of soldier settlers as ‘yeomen’ in idealistic terms was to ignore their perceived economic importance as part of Australia’s

38 Donald MacKinnon, MLA for Prahran. (The owner of Marida Yallock Estate in the Western District.) VPD, 2.8.1904, p. 566. (Quoted in Keneley, op. cit., 1999, p 154)

39 Brady, op. cit., 1918, p. 326.


41 ibid., p. 14.
national development. By 1920, soldier settlers needed to be small capitalists rather than ‘sturdy yeomen’.

Soldier settlement was seen as both a reward for the men and a stimulus for national growth. Lloyd and Rees in *The Last Shilling, A History of Repatriation in Australia* have looked at the long and evolving process of repatriating the Australian soldier and conclude:

> There is abundant evidence in both federal and state parliamentary debates to show that politicians and administrators shared this dual vision of compensation and national development in some degree. Unfortunately no attempt was ever made to articulate in a coherent national program the notion that returned soldiers could be compensated in a manner commensurate with achievement of substantial social justice in conjunction with a mighty surge of national growth.42

In hindsight, the quest for social justice probably received a lower priority than national growth. The Australian economy was incapable of providing alternative employment for the ‘diggers’, so soldier settlement seemed the most viable option.

*Post War Australia*

The immediate post war period was a difficult time for many Australians, particularly returned men and there remained the perception among ex-soldiers that they deserved better.43 Gammage records the sentiments of one who returned

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with high expectations, although acknowledging that hard work would be required:

We were welcomed back with promises of a rosy future … and perhaps a little more than our share of the common load to carry.\(^{44}\)

They had been told that they were returning to a ‘land fit for heroes’ and many must have wondered what had gone wrong. Robin Gerster argues that

In the end the Australian soldiers were the post-war victims of their own publicity. They had been promoted so heavily during the years of combat that anything less than adulation must have been tantamount to downright rejection.\(^{45}\)

Manufacturing industry, profitable during the war years, stagnated as British and European goods returned to the marketplace.\(^{46}\) The promised jobs were often unavailable. Unemployment remained between six and eleven per cent during the 1920s with a ‘permanent residue of unskilled and casual labour’.\(^{47}\) Paradoxically, at the same time, there was great optimism over the country’s potential. In 1921, H. S. Gullett, the Commonwealth Superintendent of Immigration described Australia as ‘a whole continent brimming with golden opportunities for capital and labour, and ideal home making possibilities’.\(^{48}\) The various Australian

\(^{44}\) ibid., p. 273.

\(^{45}\) Gerster, op. cit., 1987, pp. 119-120.


\(^{48}\) J. M. Powell, ‘Taylor, Stefansson and the arid centre: An historic encounter of “Environmentalism” and “Possibilism”,’ *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical*
governments regularly ‘boosted’ the country in their quests for migrants and investment.\textsuperscript{49}

The more enthusiastic promoters of ‘Australia Unlimited’ predicted a potential population of between one hundred and two hundred million by the end of the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{50} This extravagant ‘boosting’ of Australia was not only for internal consumption but was used to encourage emigration from the United Kingdom. Fry makes the point that the Imperial Conference held in London in 1917 concluded that the United Kingdom was over-populated in relation to its capacity to absorb labour in established industries.\textsuperscript{51} Conversely, the Dominions (including Australia) were seen as under-populated with vast undeveloped resources.\textsuperscript{52} Soldier settlement was enthusiastically promoted as a means of repatriation for both local and British returned soldiers.

A considerable number of British ex-soldiers settled in Australia, both in government schemes and through the private Australian Farms scheme.\textsuperscript{53} The

\textsuperscript{49} Crowley, \textit{op. cit.}, 1974, p. 358.

\textsuperscript{50} Macintyre, \textit{op. cit.}, 1986, p. 198.

\textsuperscript{51} Fry, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 29.

\textsuperscript{52} While this view of Australia was inaccurate, in fairness to the Imperial planners, this view had been promulgated by successive Australian politicians. Macintyre, \textit{op. cit.}, 1986, pp. 198 – 202.

Imperial settlers were even less successful than their Australian counterparts and in 1933, a Royal Commission examined the failures associated with the Victorian scheme. A pamphlet entitled ‘Land Settlement in Victoria’ was presented to prospective British migrants. It extolled the virtues of soldier settlement concluding that: ‘It is not an experiment but it is an important and liberal extension of the closer settlement policy which has been in successful operation for the past 25 years’.

The writer was not being strictly honest as Victoria’s pre-war experience with Closer Settlement had been poor. An admittedly biased Legislative Council described it as ‘a costly failure from beginning to end’. In 1914, a Royal Commission was appointed by the Watt Liberal Government to examine the workings of the closer settlement scheme. It noted several main reasons for the previous failure of closer settlement. Unsuitable land was purchased, inadequate living areas were allocated and men without adequate capital or experience were

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54 For a description of the Western Australian schemes see G. C. Bolton, A Fine Country to Starve In, University of Western Australia Press, Nedlands, 1972.

55 The Imperial land scheme was a disaster with Victoria gaining only about 200 families at the cost of over £400,000. R. Broome, The Victorians, Arriving, Fairfax Syme and Weldon Associates, McMahon’s Point, N.S.W., 1984, p. 146. McDonald gives a figure of 464 (family heads) for the number of migrants placed on the land in Victoria under the various Agreements. S. R. McDonald, op. cit., 1978, p. 230. Royal Commission on Migrant Land Settlement, Victoria, 1933, op. cit.

56 Royal Commission on Migrant Land Settlement, op. cit., 1933.

57 ibid., p. 8.


allotted blocks. These factors were later used in criticism of soldier settlement after World War One.

At the end of the war, Australia was ‘deeply moved by a feeling of gratitude’ and, felt that it owed the ‘diggers’ a ‘debt of honour’. As a result it embarked on a massive soldier settlement scheme, which repeated the major mistakes of previous closer settlement schemes. Once again, unsuitable land was purchased, acreages were inadequate, capital was not required and men with little or no experience were allotted blocks.

Even with the benefit of local knowledge, the potential pitfalls of the scheme were ignored. The Hamilton Spectator concluded in 1920 that,

> The gallant men who fought to preserve this country well deserve the reward of some of the land to make a living from which they fought for, and the influx of a soldier population and their families into the district is beneficial in every way.

While the Hamilton Spectator was ignoring the possible problems of soldier settlement, the editor understood that wider issues were at stake for the region. Local businesses and existing landowners hoped to gain considerable economic benefits from having a soldier settlement estate in the vicinity. As noted above,

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60 ibid.
graziers ignored their local towns. Soldier settlers would be more likely to support their local shops and businesses. A number of towns, including Penshurst and Casterton, were hemmed in on all sides by pastoral holdings, which stifled further development. In 1921, Mr Bailey MLA felt that the Western District ‘should carry three to four times the present population’ which would be to the benefit of local towns and settlers.

In the Casterton district, the Casterton News extolled the virtues of soldier settlement for both the district and settlers, considering that the scheme should have been even more extensive:

> In a district such as this with a record of only one drought since its occupation by white men, unequalled climate, producing best in wool, meat and cereals of all kinds, except wheat, while the greater part of Australia is languishing under drought conditions, the season could hardly be better than it is, where the man on the land becomes well off and lives to a ripe old age, where ailing soldiers return and have restored to them all their prewar health and vital energies, land suitable for soldier settlement has been rejected at prices lower than some of it has since been sold at.

In the Hamilton Administrative District, 349,763 acres were purchased at a total price of £1,955,994 and approximately four hundred and fifty settlers took up blocks in the district.

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The ‘Report of the Royal Commission on Soldier Settlement’ stated that ‘the cry was that every soldier should get a chance if he desired to go on the land’. War injuries were not seen as detrimental as it was believed that the settlers’ health would benefit from living in the country. In Victoria, the original idea had been to place soldier settlers on Crown lands but it was also decided that the settler ‘should be given the opportunity to establish his home among his relations and old associates’. These two ideals were sometimes incompatible as very little suitable Crown land was available in the more settled areas of Victoria. The majority of the land had to be acquired from its previous owners.

Even with the official encouragement of soldier settlement, a larger than expected number of returned men wanted to become soldier settlers. In Victoria, approximately 77,850 men returned from the war. Out of this total, more than a quarter, 21,086 applied for Qualification Certificates, 16,633 were granted and by the 30th June 1924, 10,565 men had been settled. L. L. Robson’s statistical

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72 *ibid.*, p. 7.
73 Report of the Royal Commission on Soldier Settlement, 1925, *VPP*, p. 9. The Supplementary Report of the Closer Settlement Commission for the year ended 30th June, 1938, *VPP*, 1938, p. 4. gives a figure of 12,928 returned men settled in Victoria. This figure is considerably more than the figure of 10,565 quoted above. The lower figure is probably more accurate as some settlers transferred to other blocks and new files were created. Conversely, the files of settlers who were failures and whose blocks were then split up between the neighbours are missing. In addition, when some soldier settlers departed in the early years, their blocks were allocated to other returned men and the two settler’s files were bundled together. The official figures should be treated as a guide only. Lake also discusses this discrepancy in Appendix A: Lake, *op. cit.*, 1987, pp. 243-244.
analysis of the previous occupations of the First AIF shows that only seventeen per cent of the recruits had worked in primary production. In the aftermath of the previous failures and this lack of experience, why did over twenty five per cent want to become soldier settlers? There are several possible reasons, not least of which was the official encouragement given to soldier settlement as a means of repatriation. In 1915, J. C. Watson, the honorary organiser of the proposed Federal repatriation scheme, sent a questionnaire to all soldiers in training and at the front asking if they wanted to settle on the land. The results indicated that almost a third wanted to become farmers. To a soldier living in a trench in France the dream of an independent free existence would have been attractive. Pre-war closer settlement propaganda extolling the benefits of small farming may also have influenced the respondents. For those who survived to become part of the soldier settlement scheme, it was only a dream, as, with rising indebtedness, their independence rarely eventuated.

The promoters of the scheme encouraged the dream of life as a small farmer for the returning soldiers. In 1917, the Hon. A. Robinson MLC stated that ‘… the advisability of going upon the land was, I believe, put before every soldier on his

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75 J. C. Watson was an ex-Labor Prime Minister and a strong advocate of Closer Settlement.
76 Lake, op. cit., 1987, p. 32.
77 M. G. Bruce, ‘The work of closer settlement’, Dalgety’s Review, July 1907, pp. 66-76.
return’. The soldiers had to endure a long sea voyage on the troop ships bringing them back to Australia. Little or no attempt was made to entertain them, or otherwise improve their quality of life during their journey. They were thus a captive audience for lectures on the benefits of becoming soldier settlers. As one settler recalled

On our return from overseas, even before we landed, we were lectured and had pamphlets handed [to] us, advising us to take up a life on the land. Guaranteeing to provide land that would return us a suitable income for our work right away and become our own in a reasonably short time.79

The Second Report of the Rural Reconstruction Commission (1944) observed that:

It has been said that in some places the men who joined the forces were told that they would be given a block of land on their return from the war.80

While recruiting committees may have made this statement, no evidence has been found of soldier settlers claiming they had been given this information. However, on their return, many found that their old jobs were no longer available and that unemployment was rising.81 For rural workers, with the changing demographics

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79 Letter from W. Douglas (Elderslie) to Hon. W. S. Manifold, MLC, March 1932.
of the region leading to uncertain employment prospects, there was often no real
alternative to soldier settlement.82

Hamilton as a Site for Settlement

Thomas Cherry, the Professor of Agriculture at the University of Melbourne from
1911 to 1916, identified parts of Victoria which he referred to as Closer
Settlement Country.83 He made this decision primarily on the basis of an annual
rainfall of between twenty-five and forty inches. Cherry felt that this rainfall
allowed greater development than was possible in the wheat belt. Cropping, dairy
cattle, fat cattle, and sheep were all expected to be viable. In addition, he
suggested that in ‘many parts a farm of from 80 to 150 acres will keep a family in
comfort or even in affluence’.84 Cherry included most of The Hamilton
Administrative District in his ‘Closer Settlement Country’. (Map 4.1) Cherry was
an influential figure in Victorian Agriculture and the planners of soldier
settlement would probably have noted his impressions of the region.85

83 Cherry, op. cit., 1913, p. 73.
84 ibid.
85 No evidence has been located to support this hypothesis.
Local support for soldier settlement was strong. The enthusiasm with which the scheme was promoted in the country would strengthen the confidence of applicants. The anticipated effects on the regional economy illustrate the reasons for the local ‘boosting’. It would arrest, if not temporarily reverse, the long-term population decline. Soldier settlement would provide a welcome boost to the economic activity of rural regions and was potentially profitable for established
farmers, graziers and business people. Lomas has estimated that the financial influx from soldier settlement was almost £4,000,000 for the Western District.\textsuperscript{87}

Having an estate established near a country town assisted the local economy in the short term. If the thirty-five settlers on Elderslie Estate all took up their maximum allowable advances, (and a number were actually advanced more money) there would be approximately an extra £20,000 in circulation. This was in addition to the £108,875 received from the purchase of the Estate by the C.S.B.\textsuperscript{88}

While the purchase price may not have been spent in the region, a significant percentage of the settlers’ advances, plus any private capital they possessed, would have gone into the local economy. Landowners had the opportunity to sell at inflated prices while the rest of the farming community had a guaranteed market for their surplus livestock.\textsuperscript{89} The farmers and businessmen who had called for soldier settlement estates in their districts initially reaped the benefit.\textsuperscript{90} Soldier settlers shopped at the local store, dealt with the local tradespeople and traded with the local stock agent and butter factory. This capital influx was short-lived and the majority of soldier settlers had to wait for almost two decades to see any benefit from the scheme.

\textsuperscript{87} \textit{ibid.}, p. 549. Ninety three graziers in the Western District sold estates to the C.S.B. for more than £6,000 each to provide 1,062 farms for soldiers while two hundred and eighty one farmers sold land for less than £6,000 to provide another 294 farms.

\textsuperscript{88} See Appendix three.

\textsuperscript{89} Lomas, \textit{op. cit.}, 1979, p. 546.

\textsuperscript{90} \textit{Casterton News}, 4.8.1919.
Keneley has made the point that portions of estates sold to the C.S.B. became part of a necessary rationalisation to ensure survival in a changing economic climate.91 Progressive pastoralists were able to sell off the poorer blocks and out-paddocks and use the freed up assets to lift the productivity of the rest of the property.92 Where whole estates were sold to the C.S.B., they were often deceased estates or stations where the connection between the long-term owner and the land had been previously broken.93

The imperatives of the scheme ensured that if local returned men wanted to become soldier settlers, and land was available, there would be soldier settlement.94 A study of the Qualification Certificates of soldier settlers in the area indicates that the majority were local, or at least from other parts of the Western District, and had a rural background.95 The Hamilton district had a history of small farming but a significant number of these earlier closer settlers had failed.96 Successful settlements did exist in the district, one of the most notable being the German farmers at Hochkirk (Tarrington) to the south of Hamilton. Either prospective soldier settlers had forgotten the past failures, or enough of the earlier

92 ibid., p. 188.
93 ibid.
95 Chapter five: Methods of Selection and an Introduction to the Returned Men who took up Blocks in the Hamilton Administrative District.
selectors had been successful, to keep the dream of land ownership alive among
the returned men in the district.

One reason for the interest in becoming farmers can be seen in the previous
occupations of the successful applicants for blocks. Over sixty-eight per cent had
been rural workers and a number had worked on their parents’ farms before
enlistment.97 It is likely that many family farms were not big enough to provide a
living for the father and his adult son or sons. However, like numerous other
small farmers’ sons, they would probably have gone shearing or working for
neighbours at certain times of the year.

Both the years immediately before World War One and the war years had been
good for farm labourers in Victoria. The boom in commodity prices and the
absence of numerous workers at the war ensured regular employment. However,
leaving aside the issue of patriotism, they still had economic reasons to enlist. The
wages offered to privates in the First AIF were six shillings per day or £2-2-0 per
week. In contrast, the wages paid to rural workers were substantially lower,
ranging from £1 to £1-5-0 per week. Farm labourers had traditionally been
affected by the uncertain nature of rural employment. The long-term demand for
their labour had been steadily dropping since the turn of the century as farms
became more capital-intensive operations.98 While permanent jobs still existed for

97 See chapter five.
98 J. McQuilton, ‘A rural shire at war: Yackandandah and World War I’, in R. L. Heathcote,
(ed) The Australian Experience: Essays in Australian Land Settlement and Resource
farm workers, an increasing number only had seasonal work. The majority of these men were young and single when they returned from the war and a number expressed a wish to get married when interviewed about their suitability to become soldier settlers. For these workers, becoming a soldier settler would have initially been seen as providing, at the very least, greater continuity of employment.

Soldier settlement would also provide an opportunity to rise in social class, becoming small landowners instead of itinerant workers. However to see soldier settlement in ‘class’ terms is to fail to understand the nature of small farming in much of rural Australia. For a significant number of the eighty years since the introduction of soldier settlement, many small farmers in rural Australia have been unviable and have had to work off-farm. They have been both ‘capitalist’ and ‘itinerant labourer’, and numerous small farmers owed their success to their off-farm incomes.

Conclusion
Soldier settlement after World War One was established for political reasons and in response to a number of widely held perceptions. Land was seen as the real source of wealth for the nation and politicians had an ideological commitment to rural development. It was falsely believed that farming was ‘easy’. There was a feeling that the scheme would address the continuing fears of invasion by helping
to fill the supposed ‘empty spaces’ in Australia. Finally, it was hoped that soldier settlement would help to stem the movement of country workers to the cities.

The State and Commonwealth governments, which embarked on soldier settlement after World War One, failed to learn from previous closer settlement schemes. Many returned men also ignored past failures as they applied for their Qualification Certificates in the hope of gaining their own piece of Australia. By necessity, soldier settlement was planned and implemented in great haste.\(^99\) Consequently, mistakes were made and over the next two decades, numerous attempts were made to address the problems. Chapter five will address the human input, including the processes by which applicants were chosen for soldier settlement blocks. The applicants in the Hamilton Administrative District will also be examined with reference to the personal factors most likely to affect their ability to succeed.

\(^99\) In addition to the political imperatives noted above, returned men wanted to be settled as quickly as possible.
SECTION TWO: CLAIMING THEIR REWARD

Steps should be taken throughout the State to meet the great influx of returned soldiers at the termination of the War. This phase of the aftermath of the War will tax our resources to a greater degree than we have had any experience of.

Colonel W. Fitzpatrick

Chapter Five

Methods of Selection and an Introduction to the Returned Men who took up Blocks in the Hamilton Administrative District

A good many of our soldiers have returned, some of them unfortunately maimed, blind, suffering from shell shock and broken down in health; and anything we can do for them will not be too much.

Hon. W. S. Manifold, MLC.¹

This chapter will outline the procedure adopted before a returned man could be allocated a soldier settlement block. An analysis of the men who successfully went through this process in South West Victoria provides a profile of the soldier settlers. Several of the traditionally cited reasons for the high number of failures concerned the settlers’ personal attributes.² The relevance of these reasons will be assessed by an examination of the settlers’ progress in light of the evidence they had previously provided to the Qualification Committee.

The Administrative Process of Selection

A Committee, appointed by the Victorian Minister of Lands in 1917,³ interviewed each potential soldier settler and issued successful applicants with a Qualification Certificate.⁴ This certificate was required before a returned man could apply for a

² Pike, *op. cit.*, 1929, p. 23.
³ Act No. 2,916. An Act to make provision for the Settlement of Discharged Soldiers on the Land and for other purposes. (22.10.17)
block. The majority of interviews were conducted in 1919 and 1920 after the men had been discharged from the army. Applicants had to produce documentation including discharge papers and police record, if any. In addition, they required at least three ‘satisfactory’ references attesting to their farming experience plus one from the local Repatriation Committee in the district where this experience had been obtained.5 These Certificates, and their accompanying documentation, provide the best (and often the only) means of assessing the soldier settlers, their financial situation and whether they were physically and mentally capable of the task.

The Record of Interview, when the men applied for their Qualification Certificates, provided evidence which should have been taken into account in assessing their suitability to become soldier settlers.6 However, much of the information was ignored. If the prospective settler had his references, attended the interview, could show that he had briefly worked on a farm7, claim that his health was ‘improving’ and was of ‘good character’ he would be successful.

Returned soldiers had no need to provide a deposit or have any assets.8 A lack of capital was not detrimental as:

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5 ibid., p. 8.

6 The material relating to the Qualification Certificates of the successful applicants can be found in the Advances files, PROV, VPRS 748.

7 Some successful applicants had only three months experience.

In the general enthusiasm of the moment it was intended to deal with the soldier in a liberal way, and offer him conditions under which he might reasonably hope to make good without any financial backing of his own.\(^9\)

The meeting with the Qualification Committee was, for the most part, a formality and very few applicants had to attend a follow-up interview. The answers to the questions were briefly noted, and, if there was in-depth discussion on any aspect of the application, it was not recorded. Irrespective of this brevity, there is enough information to provide a tentative assessment of each applicant’s situation. While a number of successful applicants for Qualification Certificates failed to take up blocks, all the evidence quoted is from men who actually became soldier settlers.\(^10\)

The Qualification documents relating to failed applicants for soldier settlement blocks have not been kept, so the researcher can only speculate as to why they were unsuccessful. When so many, ultimately unsuitable, men received blocks, it is a reasonable assumption that the failures had serious problems. Lake has suggested that the influence of alcohol was an important factor in this group.\(^11\)

The negative attitudes of both the C.S.B. and local inspectors towards soldier settlers who drank provide strong evidence in support of her hypothesis.

\(^9\) ibid., p. 7.

\(^10\) The files of the returned men who never actually took up their blocks are absent. Approximately 6,000 men received Qualification Certificates but failed to take up blocks. Report of the Royal Commission on Soldier Settlement, 1925, p. 9.

\(^11\) Lake, op. cit., 1987, p. 54.
Even where the Committee identified settlers at risk of failure, there were cases where the report was ignored by the C.S.B. One of these was Murdoch Vickery. He had good references but, with rare candour, his local land committee doubted whether ‘his health is good enough for him to undertake the hardships of land settlement’. Vickery received a block on Elderslie Estate where he survived until 1937. In 1928, his inspector described him, in contradictory terms, as a ‘weak settler’ although a ‘fair farmer’.

References

The references in the files attesting to the applicants’ suitability were uniformly good. This is understandable as, in the prevailing political climate, only a disagreeable former employer would not give a returned man a good reference. More attention was paid to the applicant’s character than to his farming experience. References usually mentioned sobriety. V. J. Ball of Glenorchy Estate was described as ‘...thoroughly sober in habits’ while S. Simkin was ‘...a total abstainer’ and Richard Price was ‘... a man of sober and industrious habits and altogether impeccable character’. H. V. Shepherd’s drinking habits were not

12 PROV, VPRS 748, Box 74, M. Vickery, Elderslie Estate, Qualification Certificate documentation.
13 ibid., Inspector Campbell to the C.S.B., 3.4.26.
14 ibid., ‘pink’ form report, 29.8.28.
15 PROV, VPRS 748. Box 6, V. J. Ball, Glenorchy Estate, Qualification Certificate.
16 PROV, VPRS 748. Box 141, S. Simkin, Glenorchy Estate, Qualification Certificate.
17 PROV, VPRS 748. Box 126, R. Price, Section 20, Qualification Certificate.
mentioned but he was ‘... obliging and obedient’. While these are all excellent qualities, they would be of greater relevance in an application for a farm labourer’s position than in an application to become an independent farmer.

Numerous returned men were no longer the young, fit, and enthusiastic workers they had been before their military service. Roy Stevens received a medical discharge with pleuritis and was unable to undertake heavy work. One of his references described the man he had been before the war in glowing terms:

I found him to be a very capable, industrious and trustworthy employee. ... Thoroughly competent to undertake any class of farm work and just the type of man to make good on a block of land.

Stevens was never to regain his prewar physical condition. While he did his best under difficult circumstances, farming was always a struggle. In 1938, he was described as a ‘Good type of settler but suffers from war disabilities’.

Gordon Beavis who received a Section 20 block near Heywood, was described as follows:

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18 PROV, VPRS 748. Box 139, H. V. Shepherd, Gringegalga Estate, Qualification Certificate.
20 PROV, VPRS 748. Box 146, R. J. Stevens, Qualification Certificate, Reference from Thomas Tobin, Winslow. 1.3.20.
21 PROV, VPRS 5,714. Box 694, R. J. Stevens, Revaluation File.
22 ‘Section 20’ blocks were individual blocks, not part of an Estate. They were purchased by the intending settler from a private owner and subsequently taken over by the C.S.B. They were not encouraged by the Board and were in the minority. See Appendix One: Glossary.
if there is one man in the State who possesses the necessary qualifications for making good on the land, that man is Gordon Beavis ... I make this statement calmly and deliberately as a practical farmer myself.23

Beavis had been shell-shocked and no longer had the ‘necessary qualifications’. His subsequent personal and financial failures may have been avoided with greater forethought on the part of his well-meaning friends and neighbours.24 It might have been better for Beavis and his family if he had been denied a Certificate. His state of health will be discussed in more detail below.

Excerpts from the references provided by James Falconer of Elderslie are typical:

he is specially gifted as regards ability, determination and grit, ... is an intelligent worker, practical and hardy. ... highest reputation for honesty, industry and sobriety.25

These references were not indicative of Falconer’s future performance. He received numerous poor reports from his inspectors and was not highly regarded as a worker. In 1935 he was described by the C.S.C. as a ‘Failure. Block not worked to advantage. Neglected in the past. Has been placed on probation by the Commission’.26 Falconer was ultimately successful, but his file contains numerous references to his shortcomings.

23 PROV, VPRS 748. Box 9, G. C. Beavis, Section 20, Heywood, Qualification Certificate.
24 In 1935, it was reported that Beavis’s whereabouts were unknown. There was a suggestion that he had gone to N.S.W. owing the C.S.B. £1,732-10-7. ibid., Inspector Hamill to C.S.B., 4.7.35.
25 PROV, VPRS 748. Box 50, J. C. Falconer, Elderslie Estate, References from his Qualification Certificate.
26 PROV, VPRS 5,714. Box 1,146, Re-subdivision Files, 4.2.35. This file contains brief thumbnail sketches of all the settlers on Elderslie when the blocks of failed settlers were being subdivided and split up amongst the survivors.
These examples show that the references collected by applicants were potentially unreliable documents. Past employers and neighbours who gave a returned man an unrealistically good reference were not helping if he was unable to function as the ‘sturdy yeoman’ so beloved of the press and politicians. Previous employers may not have realised that their former workers would never regain the health and fitness for hard work that they had enjoyed before their war service.

Age and Marital Status

Applicants were asked their age and marital status, two factors relevant to their future prospects as soldier settlers. The ideal settler should have been old enough to have significant farming experience but young enough to handle the hard work associated with soldier settlement. As Figure 6.1 shows, the majority of the settlers in the Hamilton Administrative district were between twenty and thirty-five years of age.

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Small farmers had traditionally been referred to as ‘sturdy yeomen’ in the press. Many soldier settlers were anything but sturdy.
Figure 5.1. Ages of applicants for Qualification Certificates, Circa. 1919-1920, N = 97.28

Source: Data from Qualification Certificates of successful applicants from the Hamilton Administration District.

The eldest was forty-three29 while the youngest was twenty.30 The average age of twenty-eight years should have been ideal for soldier settlers.31 In normal circumstances, the men should have been in their prime and ready to cope with the hard pioneering lifestyle. However, the war had intervened and numerous men were working under a considerable disadvantage due to the effects of their military service.

28 The record of interview is not always complete. In some files sections have been left blank. This accounts of the different numbers of the sample in the analysis of the various factors.

29 PROV, VPRS 748. Box 25, D. M. Cameron was the eldest. He had not been injured but was described as having ’a slight murmur of the heart’. (Medical report included with his Qualification Certificate.)

30 PROV, VPRS 748. Box 91, C. L Buchanan, Warrong Estate. While his youth could be expected to be advantageous, he did not survive.

31 Lake’s sample had a median age of 28. Lake, op. cit., 1987, p. 54.
Out of the sample of soldier settlers examined, only seventeen of the eighty-eight were married.\textsuperscript{32} Reasons for this include the relatively young age of the applicants, coupled with the length of their war service. The low wages received by rural workers could also have influenced the decision to remain single.

The married applicants were, for the most part, slightly older than the single men. A number of single applicants stated that they expected to get married in the near future.\textsuperscript{33} While no notation was made in the Advances Files when a soldier settler married, the ‘pink’ form reports indicate that over the first decade, the majority did marry.

The marital status of prospective soldier settlers was important as the whole family was expected to help on the block. This especially applied in the dairy industry, as the milking of cows by hand was a labour-intensive task. A ‘pink’ form report on David Annett in 1935 concluded that ‘land is more suitable for dairying but family too young at present’.\textsuperscript{34} To be starting as a single soldier settler was a handicap. The settler would have to cope with both solitude and the lack of any assistance during the all important establishment phase.

\textsuperscript{32} A few certificates did not indicate the marital status of the applicant.

\textsuperscript{33} PROV, VPRS 748. Box 45, W. Douglas, Elderslie Estate, Inquiry Board, Wally Douglas had a mother, father and sister to support. PROV, VPRS 748. Box 45. J. Doyle, ‘Taylors’ Land Estate, Qualification Certificate, John Doyle wanted a home for his two sisters. (They were spinsters aged 21 and 30.)

\textsuperscript{34} PROV, VPRS 748. Box 3, D. Annett, Knebsworth Estate, ‘pink’ form report, 4.6.35.
Soldier Settlers’ Health and its Impact on their Future Prospects

The ‘Report of the Royal Commission on Soldier Settlement’ stated that ‘the cry was that every soldier should get a chance if he desired to go on the land’.35 War injuries were not seen as detrimental as it was believed that the settlers’ health would benefit from living in the country.36 While this may have been correct in some cases, there were other instances where obtaining a block was detrimental to the settler concerned.

Eric Lowe of Warrong should have been denied a Qualification Certificate because of his state of health.37 He had been discharged from the army on medical grounds with a contusion of his back. When Lowe attended his interview, he was suffering from neurasthenia and functional tremors. His medical report considered that ‘He will require some further treatment but should be able to take up outdoor life, preferably as a grazier later on’. The suggestion inherent in the medical report was that the open-air life of a ‘grazier’ would be easy enough for a physically or mentally damaged returned soldier. In 1921, Lowe wanted to transfer his block as his doctor had told him that he would never be fit enough for hard work again.38 Lowe transferred his block to C. L Buchanan; another returned man, who only lasted until November 1922 when he relinquished the block due to

36 ibid., p. 8.
37 PROV, VPRS 748 Box 91, E. Lowe, Warrong Estate, Qualification Certificate documentation.
38 ibid., lessee to C.S.B., 3.10.21. At this time Lowe was only 33 years of age.
sinusitis. Powell has analysed the soldier settlers who failed in the first few years of the scheme in ‘Australia’s ‘Failed’ Soldier Settlers, 1914-23. Towards a Demographic Profile’. He admits that his conclusions are tentative but suggests that most of the early ‘failures’ were probably suffering from physical injury and psychological trauma. When the soldier settlers’ wives promised to be faithful to their husbands in ‘sickness or in health’ during their wedding vows, it is probable that few fully realised the actual, or potentially fragile, state of their partners’ health. Prospective soldier settlers were asked about both their health and the reasons for their discharge from the army. Understandably, they wanted to provide as good an impression as possible and future events indicate that several of them failed to mention pre-existing ailments. The reasons for the men’s discharge often provide a better indication of their condition than the applicants revealed to the Committee.

While the settlers’ health was one of the critical factors in his future success or failure, the Qualification Committees did not see it as a problem. The Royal

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39 PROV, VPRS 748. Box 91, C. L Buchanan, Warrong Estate, lessee to C.S.B., 6.11.22.
41 The severity of damage to the men’s lungs from gas was commonly ignored. As this was a complaint that worsened over time, it is possible that the men themselves did not realise the gravity of their situation.
Commission into Soldier Settlement noted that it had been understood at an official level that

every soldier should get a chance if he desired to go on the land, especially if he was suffering from war injuries, it being supposed that his health would benefit from living in the country.42

A significant percentage of the successful applicants in the Hamilton District had been wounded or gassed. Out of a sample of one hundred and three Qualification applicants, forty-six received their discharge from the army on medical grounds while fifty-four mentioned to the Committee that they were suffering from (or getting over) war-related ailments. While there is a strong correlation between the two groups, a number of applicants who gave their health as ‘good’ were discharged for medical reasons and several who were discharged at the end of the war were later found to have health problems related to their war service. The Record of Interview used the innocuous abbreviation ‘G.S.W.’ to describe a gunshot wound and the actual injury was usually listed as just a G.S.W. or a ‘G.S.W. in the back’, ‘leg’ or wherever. The severity of the injury was rarely documented. Most medical reports of applicants with pre-existing ailments suggested that the man was ‘improving rapidly’ although in a number of cases the affliction intensified over time. The effects of gas on the lungs were particularly insidious in this regard, while the long-term trauma associated with shell shock was poorly understood and often worsened with declining economic

circumstances. Little was known about the continuing psychological effects of trench warfare.

The C.S.B. and Qualification Committees seem, from their acceptance of the references, to have expected returned men to be the same men who went to war. This was impossible for many ‘diggers’, who found solace in a variety of socially unacceptable ways including alcohol.\textsuperscript{43} Michael Kelly of Korongah Estate was twenty-four years of age when he received his Certificate and had been twice wounded and once gassed.\textsuperscript{44} In 1930 his wife, Rubena Kelly wrote to the Board that

\begin{quote}
Mr Kelly has not been well this long time and is suffering a lot with his nerves and is very excitable and is not fit for work and I have to battle along on my own and it is terrible hard...\textsuperscript{45}
\end{quote}

Numerous inspectors’ reports gave the impression that Kelly was to blame for his situation:

\begin{quote}
He is very neglectful about his home, on visiting it you at once realise it is the home of a drunkard ... The soldier settlers on the Korongah estate are very disgusted with him and have no sympathy for him.\textsuperscript{46}
\end{quote}

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\textsuperscript{43} Inspectors wrote to the C.S.B. pointing out that soldier settlers had been drinking irrespective of the amount. They did not accept the concept of a social drink. Alcohol, per se, was condemned.

\textsuperscript{44} PROV, VPRS 748. Box 87, Michael Kelly, Korongah Estate, Qualification Certificate.

\textsuperscript{45} \textit{ibid.}, Mrs Kelly to the C.S.B., 28.1.30.

\textsuperscript{46} \textit{ibid.}, Inspector to C.S.B., 13.8.32.
Kelly came to the attention of both the C.S.B. and the police on numerous occasions for drunkenness and it is a reasonable assumption that his military experience was a significant causal factor. He was still on his block in 1938 but evidence in his Advances file indicates that this was due more to his wife’s work than his own exertions.47

Gordon Beavis was a particularly telling example of a settler whose health was ignored to his, and his family’s, long-term detriment. Beavis’s Qualification Certificate described him as medically unfit and suffering from shell shock with ‘Tremors, palpitations of heart, nervousness, slight impediment in speech’; however his condition was seen as ‘improving rapidly’. The accompanying doctor’s report stated that

> His condition is due to shell shock. Altho [sic] unfit for work, he is in an improving state of health. I am of the opinion that outdoors work will gradually cure him, but it must be fairly light and continuous and in congenial surroundings. He has had a very severe shock but is improving rapidly.

Dr ----. Dep’t Medical Officer.48

This report was ignored and Beavis was placed on a dairy farm, a situation where the work could not be described as ‘fairly light’. By the early 1930s he was described as a ‘failure’ with no prospects of success as his arrears were too high.49

In June 1934, his wife wrote to the C.S.B. that Beavis had just returned from

47 \textit{ibid.}, Inspector to C.S.B., 25.4.31.
49 \textit{ibid.}, ‘pink’ form report. 21.2.30.
Caulfield Military Hospital, practically blind.⁵⁰ The next year his whereabouts were described as unknown.⁵¹

The Advances files indicate that the C.S.B. believed that Beavis’s problems were his own fault and that he was a dishonest settler.⁵² However, it had been reported in the early 1930s that he had lost half his dairy herd through drowning and starvation which was blamed on poor drainage.⁵³ It is difficult to assess how much of this situation was caused by the settler’s personal failings and how much was due to his wet and poorly drained block. For a man with his medical history to lose half his dairy herd while being in an untenable financial position would have negatively affected his mental condition.

Rueben Futerieal was another settler whose health was ignored.⁵⁴ He was described as being of ‘good character and steady habits who is likely to make a success of any venture for which his experience as a worker has qualified him’.⁵⁵ Futerieal had received a medical discharge with a G.S.W. in the right thigh.

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⁵⁰ *ibid.*, Letter from wife to C.S.B., 30.6.34.

⁵¹ *ibid.*, Letter from Inspector Hamill to the C.S.B., 4.7.35. Hamill reported that he had heard that Beavis’ wife had ‘kicked him out’.

⁵² *ibid.*, According to a Supervisor’s report dated the 7.11.31, Beavis had a long record of dishonesty dating back to 1924. The supervisor noted that he: ‘Could not rely on lessee’s statement. Said sheep had died - then carcasses burnt. No evidence could be found. Property in a shocking state, rabbits, ferns etc, fences falling down, everything in disrepair … a lazy and careless man.’

⁵³ *ibid.*, Inspector Hamill to the C.S.B., 1931.

⁵⁴ PROV, VPRS 748. Box 97, R. Futerieal, Elderslie Estate, Qualification Certificate.

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, Reference provided by J Clancy. (Shire Secretary)
Consequently, his Qualification Certificate described him as slightly lame in the right leg. This was an understatement as it was one and three quarter inches shorter.

From the start, Futerieal received adverse reports from the Board. Settlers were expected to do their own work, including fencing. He was forced to pay someone else to do his fencing which increased his Advances account. By February 1921, Futerieal’s advances had already exceeded the maximum allowed and by May, they had risen to £698-7-8. This did not include a house or building materials. In August 1921, he was advanced another £200 for sheep and in November wrote to the C.S.B. again, as he wanted another 150 breeding ewes. He received the money. Futerieal had little chance of success from the time he went on to his block but he was able to receive substantially greater advances than provided for in the Soldier Settlement Act. Initially the Board ignored his inspector’s reports and continued to grant him advances.

56 ibid., Inspector Campbell to the C.S.B., 5.8.20. ‘Futerieal is unable to do his own labour.’
57 £625.
58 ibid, C.S.B., to lessee, 5.5.21.
59 ibid., C.S.B., to lessee, 2.8.21.
60 ibid., C.S.B, to lessee, 29.11.21.
61 An Act to make Provision for the Settlement of Discharged Soldiers on the Land and for other Purposes 1917. (Act No 2,916 1917)
Futerieal struggled on for several years but was physically incapable of making a success of his block. In 1924 his inspector wrote to the C.S.B. giving a bleak assessment of his situation and prospects, noting that he is not making any headway. ... He states that he has been suffering from a bad leg as the result of a wound suffered while on active service. ... This man has not been able to do any work since going into occupation ... Futerieal is inclined not to carry on ... 62

Futerieal was forced to transfer his block. So, why did he apply for a block in the first place? He provides a partial answer in a letter he wrote to the C.S.B. in 1924:

I beg to state that I am disappointed at not being able to carry on as I had hoped to do. I thought that a grazing proposition would have suited my lameness but I have since discovered that I am not able to ride as I had expected and of course I cannot walk any distance. 63

Either this man started with an inflated idea of his own capabilities or a misunderstanding of the life of a soldier settler. It may have been better for Futerieal and others in similar health if they had been denied a Certificate. The Qualification Committee who granted him his certificate must bear part of the blame for his failure.

At least one settler considered that the Qualification Committee did not ignore his health. Charles Dougheney received a G.S.W. in his left leg and was discharged

62 PROV, VPRS 748. Box 97, R. Futerieal, Elderslie Estate, inspector to the C.S.B., 16.2.24.
63 ibid., lessee to C.S.B., 15.3.24.
as ‘Medically unfit - not due to misconduct’. He had been a state school teacher but was advised not to resume teaching:

Owing to the after effects of tetanus it is not advisable for him to be employed at clerical work and owing to the severe nature of the wound he received in the left leg he would be unable in my opinion to successfully work a block of heavy land. (Report of Local Repatriation Committee.)

Because of this assessment, he received a ‘...purely grazing certificate and the whole of this block is very light grazing land indeed’. In 1930, his inspector described him as ‘High strung and nervous after his war service’. In 1933, Dougheney wrote to the C.S.C. that he had been ‘...debarred by the Qualification Committee on account of war injury from applying for the better blocks’. This seemed a cruel punishment on top of his war wounds: to be given a mediocre, although cheaper, block where he was less likely to succeed.

The physical condition of a significant number of returned men made them unsuitable for the rigours of pioneering farming. They were going onto largely undeveloped blocks (even in the Western District) and had to live in primitive conditions. The majority of Estates were formed from the sub-division of large holdings. Therefore, these blocks would have consisted of bare land with few

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64 PROV, VPRS 748. Box 44, C. Dougheney, Qualification Committee report, letter from Local Repatriation Committee.
65 ibid., Letter to C.S.C. explaining that he could not meet his commitments.
67 ibid., lessee to C.S.B., 2.5.33.
68 Lomas op. cit., 1979, p. 549.
improvements. It was common for settlers to live in tents during the first year or two.

Mr Justice Pike concluded in 1929 that the number unable to succeed due to war disabilities was only fifty-seven out of approximately 11,000 in Victoria.69 His statistical conclusion seems on the evidence of a small sample taken from one region of Victoria to be unrealistically low.

A perception existed among the planners of the soldier settlement scheme that there was an innate connection between returned soldiers and the soil. The ruling orthodoxy was that the outdoor life was exactly what men in poor health needed for rehabilitation.70 In 1927, the Annual Report of the C.S.B. showed that the Board continued to believe that ‘life in the open air had been the means of re-establishing many a soldier’s health and strength’.71 However, the report concluded that, even though

78.9% of the applicants were successful in obtaining Qualification Certificates, experience afterwards showed that many of them through War disabilities, inexperience, and other causes were unable to successfully work their farms.72

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72 *ibid.*
The majority suffered from the effects of the conditions endured during their war service\textsuperscript{73} and the evidence presented to the Qualification Committees only hints at the discharged soldiers’ physical condition.\textsuperscript{74}

The soldier settlers’ physical and mental health had an important influence on their fortunes. While their ability to make a living was the most critical factor, poor or declining health could mean the difference between remaining in occupation and relinquishing the block. Here a wife with farming ability and reasonable health could make a significant difference. After 1925, health was rarely given as the main reason for failure or the settler relinquishing his block.\textsuperscript{75}

It is probable that a number of settlers, described as poor workers, were unable to complete their farming tasks due to indifferent health.

\textit{Rural Background and Farming Experience}

Lack of farming experience was another common criticism of settlers who found themselves in financial difficulties.\textsuperscript{76} As noted above, the majority were in their twenties when they took up their blocks and had spent up to four years fighting for their country. Even with their rural backgrounds, the younger settlers would

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{73} The conditions referred to included living conditions, war trauma, wounds and the effects of gas.
\item \textsuperscript{74} Pryor, \textit{op. cit.}, 1932. ‘Many of the returned men would never become 100\% normal as they were physically incapacitated or mentally warped.’ p. 8.
\item \textsuperscript{75} In the late 1930s and 1940s, health was once again given as a reason for soldier settlers selling or transferring their blocks.
\end{itemize}
have had limited opportunities to obtain the necessary experience. There was only a minimal attempt, on the behalf of the authorities, to provide training. A Sub-Committee had been appointed by the Federal Parliamentary War Committee to consider ‘Settling Returned Soldiers upon the Land’. It recommended that applicants for Qualification Certificates be classified into three groups, those who were immediately suitable, those who after probationary training may have proved suitable, and those who were permanently unsuitable for soldier settlement. The Sub-Committee further recommended that those in need of experience should spend time at either a training farm or working for private farmers. It reasoned that this would give the inexperienced applicant an idea of farming life and enable the identification of those unfit for the land. These were worthy aims, which may have helped reduce the number of unsuitable settlers. However, in the rush to settle the men during 1919 and 1920, these recommendations were ignored and little or no training was provided. Inspectors were appointed to assist settlers, but this was inadequate when measured against the number of inexperienced men.

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78 Lake has mentioned that a small amount of training was provided for prospective soldier settlers. However, I have found no evidence of the Hamilton settlers receiving any training. Lake, op. cit., 1987, pp. 57-58.

79 See chapters eight and nine.
Lake’s analysis shows that the Hamilton settlers were more experienced than those in other parts of the state and the sample of figures used in this thesis suggests that this could be true.\textsuperscript{80} Over ninety-eight per cent of the applicants surveyed were described as having a farming background or had worked in other rural industries. Out of these, almost seventy per cent gave their previous occupations as farm workers, farm labourers or station hands. (Table 5.1) Several of these also had references attesting to their skill and reliability as shearers. It was common for seasonal workers to combine shearing with farm labouring. There is a certain amount of overlapping of occupations. Where this has occurred, the first occupation listed has been taken as the main one. This possibly gives a false impression as applicants may have listed the most farm-oriented occupation as the primary one.

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{lccc}
\hline
District & No Experience. & Some Experience. & Very Experienced. \\
\hline
Hamilton District. & 12.2 & 38.8 & 49 \\
All settlers in State. & 19.6 & 43.8 & 36.6 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{Percentage of settlers with farming experience}
\end{table}

\textsuperscript{80} Lake, \textit{op. cit.}, 1987, p. 113.
Table 5.1. Applicant’s previous occupations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Previous Occupation</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Farm Workers</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>68.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmers</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>20.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share-farmers</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farm managers</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shearers</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stock Agent, other ancillary rural</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Rural</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: PROV, VPRS 748. Qualification Certificate documentation of applicants for soldier settlement blocks in the Hamilton Administrative District. NB. Some of the Qualification Certificates do not list the applicant’s previous occupation, which accounts for the lower number in the sample.

While the experience of working on a property would provide valuable practical training for soldier settlers, labouring under instruction is quite different from being an independent farmer. It is a reasonable supposition that a farm manager would have more experience. Farming was becoming increasingly scientific and experience in modern methods and managerial skills would have been valuable. While the failure of many settlers was blamed on their lack of managerial skills, not many established farmers in the 1920s would have known much about financial management. Dyer has researched wheat farmers in South Australia during the Depression and concludes that the majority of these farmers were financially incompetent. This problem may not have been restricted to South


Australian farmers. It is unlikely that the majority of Victorian farmers were much different.

Any attempt to provide a meaningful analysis of the level of experience of prospective soldier settlers from the Qualification Certificates is necessarily subjective. As applicants put a brave face on their physical condition, it later became apparent that a number enhanced their experience in the desire to gain land. Others had their abilities ‘boosted’ in references provided by well-meaning former employers and neighbours. Ernest Arnold was twenty-one years of age when he applied for his Qualification Certificate in 1919.  

83 PROV, VPRS 748. Box 4, E. Arnold, Warrong Estate. Qualification Certificate.

84 \textit{ibid.}, ‘pink’ form report, 8.6.29.

85 PROV, VPRS 748. Box 7, W. Smith, Glenorchy Estate, Qualification Certificate.

Ernest Arnold was twenty-one years of age when he applied for his Qualification Certificate in 1919.  

83 PROV, VPRS 748. Box 4, E. Arnold, Warrong Estate. Qualification Certificate.

84 \textit{ibid.}, ‘pink’ form report, 8.6.29.

85 PROV, VPRS 748. Box 7, W. Smith, Glenorchy Estate, Qualification Certificate.

He had spent two and a half years in the army but claimed to have been a farmer for eight years. Even in that era of minimal schooling, to have started farming at eleven years of age seems premature. In 1929, his inspector had doubts about his abilities considering that ‘this man must be kept under strict supervision if he is to be successful. I’m keeping a close watch over him’.  

84 Arnold was still on his block in 1938 but consistently received adverse assessments in the ‘pink’ form reports.

William Smith, aged twenty-eight, was said to have had ten years experience as a farmer.  

85 His references described him as having ‘good character and considerable farming experience’ and as ‘sturdy, trustworthy and very capable of
any work on the land’. Smith was discharged from the Army as medically unfit with a G.S.W., having lost the sight of one eye.\textsuperscript{86} In April 1925, an Inquiry Board considered that ‘This lessee cannot possibly succeed. He is both a delicate and inexperienced man. The task is beyond him’.\textsuperscript{87} In 1925 he transferred his block. The conclusions of the Inquiry Board suggest that he should never have been granted a Certificate on the grounds of both health and experience.\textsuperscript{88}

An analysis of soldier settlers from the Hamilton Administration district suggests that too much weight was subsequently given to experience in assessing the failure rate of soldier settlers. Agricultural methods were evolving and even supposedly experienced men found it impossible to farm profitably during the 1920s and 1930s. In addition, experience would be gained by working on the block. Finally, settlers may have been experienced in one type of farming but were allotted blocks on estates where they were forced to produce other commodities. One of these was James Falconer of Elderslie.\textsuperscript{89} Falconer told the qualification committee that he wanted either a block in the Mallee or one in an

\textsuperscript{86} ibid.

\textsuperscript{87} ibid, J. Williams, (Chair of Inquiry Board) to C.S.B., 29.4.25.

\textsuperscript{88} ibid.

\textsuperscript{89} PROV VPRS 748. Box 50, James Falconer, Elderslie Estate.
irrigation district. Experience in cropping or irrigation situations would not necessarily help in running a mixed farm and vice versa.

**Previous Residence and Local Knowledge**

In addition to settlers’ actual farming experience, the influence of the formative environment on their future prospects was also relevant. Settlers who had previously lived and worked in the area would have a better appreciation of local conditions than those from other regions of the state. As mentioned in chapter four, the majority of the Hamilton settlers were previously resident in the Western District. An examination of the successful applicants for three estates in the Coleraine area further supports this view:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Estate</th>
<th>Total successful applicants</th>
<th>Local successful applicants</th>
<th>Percentage of local men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Glenorchy</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>84.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hilgay</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>77.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gringegalgona</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>72.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Prospective soldier settlers applied for specific blocks. Some of the inferior blocks on estates were initially rejected by applicants which makes the percentage of local soldier settlers even more significant.

The significant number of local men was always probable in an established farming region with a large number of ex-farm workers wishing to take up blocks.

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90 ibid., Qualification documentation.

91 A common mixed farming situation was wool growing combined with dairying and pigs. See Appendix One: Glossary.

It is possible that local settlers may have obtained help from their families. However, given the state of the roads, settlers would have to be living in close proximity to gain a great deal of material support. Clive Grummett, from Elderslie, had family at Bahgallah near Casterton and in his Qualification Certificate stated that he ‘was guaranteed full use of all his father’s farming plant’. Bahgallah was between forty and fifty miles from Grummett’s block so it is unlikely that much farming plant actually travelled between Bahgallah and Elderslie. While assistance was possible, the new settlers would be more likely to gain assistance from their fellow settlers on the Estate.

Assets of the New Settlers

It was less expensive to commence farming on soldier settlement blocks in South West Victoria than in cropping regions, but the establishment costs were still substantial. The relatively high potential risks associated with farming meant that there was always the possibility of a reduced income for any given year or years. The sharp decline in commodity prices during the early 1920s ensured that soldier settlers had reduced incomes. Reserve capital, and a substantial equity in the land, would be valuable safeguards against drought, flood, bush fire, reduced

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93 PROV, VPRS 748. Box 66, C. Grummett, Elderslie Estate, Qualification Certificate.

94 This road could more accurately be described as a track. It was not formed and gravelled until the early 1930s. Interview with Miss Josie Campbell, daughter of Murdoch Campbell of Elderslie Estate.

95 See chapter six for a discussion of the establishment costs on soldier settlement blocks in South West Victoria.

96 Davidson, op. cit., 1981, p. 266.
commodity prices or abnormal stock losses. Very few soldier settlers had either capital or equity.

While a lack of capital did not prejudice any applicant for a Qualification Certificate, Mr Justice Pike later noted that

the average settler, where he has a burden of mortgage debt up to what is generally the limit of private advances, namely about 66 per cent of the value of his land and improvements, finds he can just about make a living, and is able to carry on, but when that mortgage becomes 100 per cent and even more of the total value of his holding … the position in my mind becomes an impossible one, and the result has been that in very many cases, although the men were industrious and hardworking and would under normal circumstances succeed as farmers, the load of debt was so heavy that it was impossible for them to carry on.97

The majority of soldier settlers had a mortgage debt of almost one hundred per cent of the value of their land and improvements.98

The records of interview suggest that the Qualification Committee recognised the advisability of the applicants having at least some assets. Applicants were questioned about their available resources, both financial and in terms of plant and livestock. The answers, summarised in Table 5.3, provide mixed evidence of their ability to build up an asset base.

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97 Pike. *op. cit.*, 1929, p. 23.
98 *ibid.*
Table 5.3. Capital possessed by applicants for Qualification Certificates in the Hamilton Administrative District, 1919 - 1920

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assets in £.</th>
<th>Number of applicants</th>
<th>Percentage of applicants in the sample.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-100</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>32.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>101-200</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>25.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>201-300</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>301-400</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>401-500</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>501-600</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>601+</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Size of Sample:</strong></td>
<td><strong>90</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.00%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: PROV, VPRS 748. Qualification Certificate documentation of successful applicants for soldier settlement blocks in the Hamilton Administrative District.

A. A. Bond of Warrong could only manage to accumulate £100 as a farm labourer by the age of thirty-two.\(^99\) In contrast, Fred Handley of Elderslie was able to accumulate cash and livestock to the value of £800 by the time he was twenty-seven.\(^100\) Without more information than is available in the files, it is difficult to reach firm conclusions as to the differing degrees of capital accumulation shown by the applicants. These were, for the most part, young men, rural wages had traditionally been low, and their lives had been interrupted by the war.

The lack of an adequate capital base was often listed as a reason for failure.\(^101\) It is useful to examine this question in detail although it will be argued below that,

\(^99\) PROV, VPRS 748, Box 13, A. A. Bond, Warrong Estate, Qualification Certificate.

\(^100\) PROV, VPRS 748, Box 131, F. Handley, Elderslie Estate, Qualification Certificate.

in the long term, this was not a critical factor. As with much of the available primary source material on soldier settlement, there are limitations imposed by the material. Some Qualification Certificates estimated the monetary value of all the assets of the applicant including furniture, household effects, cows, horses and harnesses while other certificates only stated the actual money the applicant had in the bank. J. Andrews of Knebworth had a Bond valued at £117, a horse and gig valued at £40 and harness etc valued at £100 while others included these items without putting a value on them. For example, A. N. Beaton of Konongwootong North was listed as having £50 in the bank, a gratuity of £76, and equity of £240 on forty acres of land. As well, he had seven horses, three cows, two calves, eight sheep, one pig and one buggy, with no monetary value being attributed to these articles. J. L. G. Annett of Hilgay was described as having no assets, although it was noted elsewhere in the document that he had two cows, two horses and three heifers, a gig and furniture. Another group of certificates did not record any capital or possessions whatsoever.

Where this section was left blank, there may have been no assets, or alternatively the Committee did not record them. It is not clear who valued the assets or if their

103 PROV, VPRS 748. Box 7, A. E Barton of Struan Estate was described as having £100 capital plus horse, jinker, plough, harrows, and set of single harrows. (No monetary values given.)
104 PROV, VPRS 748. Box 9, A. N. Beaton, Konongwootong North Estate. Interview for Qualification Certificate.
105 PROV, VPRS 748. Box 3, J. L. G. Annett, Hilgay Estate.
stated value was only an estimate, inflated or otherwise, provided by the applicant. Finally, it is futile to try to attribute a monetary value to such unspecified items as ‘two pigs’\textsuperscript{106} or ‘fifty hens’.\textsuperscript{107} When listing the capital possessed, any assets that did not have an assessable monetary value attributed to them have been ignored in Table 5.3.

Every returned man received a War Gratuity Bond of one shilling and sixpence, with interest at 5.25 per cent per annum, for every day spent on active service.\textsuperscript{108} A minority included this figure as a separate item and it is not always clear whether other applicants were including this or not. A significant number were receiving pensions of varying amounts. This was common throughout Victoria.

The Minority Report of the Royal Commission on Soldier Settlement noted that:

> The evidence given proves that a very large number of soldier settlers suffer from disabilities for which they receive a pension. Another large percentage gave evidence that they were suffering from disabilities, but did not receive pensions. Thus, the larger percentage of soldier settlers are affected to a greater or lesser degree.\textsuperscript{109}

Pensions were a considerable help as they provided a guaranteed, though small, source of income. Garton has noted that there was a stigma attached to the

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{106} PROV, VPRS 748. Box 105, H. McCabe, Greenhills Estate, Interview for Qualification Certificate.
  \item \textsuperscript{107} PROV, VPRS, 748. Box 26, W. Capelhorn of Elderslie Estate had assets of four and a half acres of land on monthly payment, a horse and cart, two pigs and fifty hens.
  \item \textsuperscript{108} Garton, \textit{op. cit.}, 1996, p. 80.
\end{itemize}
receiving of pensions. Possibly for this reason, no figures have been located listing the number of returned soldiers in the Hamilton district receiving pensions. The number of local men suffering from war-related illnesses suggests that the pension rate was at least approaching the state average. Of the 267,607 Australians who returned from World War One, 155,422 were regarded as ‘casualties’ and by 1920 one-third were receiving invalid pensions. Table 5.4 shows a slight drop in the number of returned men on pensions by 1937. The reasons for this drop would be either men opting out of the system due to community disapproval or premature death. Soldier settlers’ health deteriorated over time, not improved.

Table 5.4. War pensions received by returned men

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Victoria</th>
<th>All States</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>29,949</td>
<td>88,836</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1937</td>
<td>25,971</td>
<td>75,109</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


In addition to the assets considered above, several settlers mentioned intangible assets that could possibly have been of assistance. One stated that his family were prepared to help him with the stocking of his block while another felt that he had good prospects of financial assistance in the future. Others stated that

112 PROV, VPRS 748. Box 95, J. R. R. Lindsey, Squattleseamere Estate. Information provided in his record of interview.
113 PROV, VPRS 748, Box 154, F. I. McKay, Elderslie Estate. Information provided in his record of interview.
family members were able to help with the development of the block. It was later noted that C. M. Nolte of Henty’s Estate received a lot of support from ‘his numerous relatives in the district’. It is impossible to put a monetary figure on these assets.

The capital possessed by applicants for soldier settlement blocks ranged from F. Handley with £800 to almost seventeen per cent with nil assets. Over two-thirds had less than £200 in assets and this entitled them to take up land valued at up to £3,500 including improvements.

In addition to the outlay on land, soldier settlers could receive advances of up to £625 for stock and plant. This meant a potential maximum debt of £4,250 plus interest, which would be virtually unsecured. The men were embarking on a capital-intensive occupation and would be forced to rely totally on credit for even the necessities of life. Settlers with minimal realisable assets were in an economically unsound situation from the outset.

Irrespective of the economic situation and the conclusions of both the Royal Commission into Soldier Settlement and Mr Justice Pike, lack of capital did

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114 PROV, VPRS 748. Box 10, C. M. Nolte, Henty’s Estate, Report of Inquiry Board. 29.2.24.
115 PROV, VPRS 748. Box 131, F. Handley of Elderslie Estate had £800 in assets which included an unspecified value in livestock.
118 ibid., p. 17.
not become a major factor in the success or failure of Western District settlers. The Advances Files show little correlation between the amount of capital possessed and success or failure rates. This point will be discussed in detail later but, briefly, the settler’s expenditure on farm inputs\(^\text{120}\) did not necessarily increase revenue. With the writing off of advances that occurred, soldier settlers without capital could end up in the same position as those who had several hundred pounds when they went on to their block.

**Conclusion**

The Royal Commission into Soldier Settlement concluded that Qualification Certificates were too easily obtained.\(^\text{121}\) This was blamed on the time factor and the inability to determine the applicant’s ability to manage a farm. It also noted that many settlers were physically and/or mentally unfit for the work involved. These conclusions were true but by 1925 it was usually too late. For better or for worse, settlers were committed to either failure or a life of considerable hardship.

While the Qualification Committees handed out Certificates freely, they were still criticised for rejecting a number of applicants. When the excitement of welcoming home the ‘diggers’ died down, the realisation that the scheme was becoming very expensive grew. It would then become popular for the press to

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\(^{119}\) Pike, *op. cit.*, 1929, p. 23.

\(^{120}\) Farm inputs are the materials need to establish and carry on farming.

\(^{121}\) Report of the Royal Commission on Soldier Settlement, 1925, p. 16.
claim that not enough attention had been paid to the ‘selection of settlers’. Powell, in examining the selection process, concluded that repatriation was a ‘debt of honour’ that should apply equally to all. He considers that if land was a ‘reward’ for them risking their lives in the service of the Empire, then how could there be any differentiation between returned men deemed suitable to be soldier settlers and those seen as unsuitable. Realistically, it could not described as a ‘reward’ when a man was put into a situation where he could end up losing his health, his family and any assets he had previously possessed. Soldier settlement was not always a suitable form of repatriation.

Theoretically, the procedure should have enabled the committee to reject unsuitable applicants and obtain the best possible soldier settlers. The questionnaire was designed by someone who knew what was required for success on the land. Farming entailed hard work, was capital intensive and required practical farming skills and managerial expertise. Therefore, the ideal settler should have been young, healthy, preferably married, have a good capital base and previous experience in the type of farming envisaged. This did not describe the typical Victorian soldier settler. If the information obtained had been used responsibly, the number of applicants to receive certificates would have been cut substantially. Assuming the various state governments were serious about making

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a success of soldier settlement, they should have only picked men who had a reasonable chance of success. If this had occurred, there would have been fewer soldier settlers which would have enabled the allocation of larger, and more economically viable, blocks. However postwar euphoria mitigated against this ideal situation. It did not really matter what the applicants said to the Qualification Committee as not a great deal of attention was given to the evidence. Consequently, many unsuitable men became soldier settlers and a significant number had their future lives damaged by their inability to cope with the rigours of soldier settlement.

The evidence analysed in this chapter indicates that a considerable number of soldier settlers were at risk of failure from the time they moved onto their farms. Subsequent events indicated that the lack of experience and low asset base were not critical factors in their success or failure. The indifferent health of numerous settlers was a burden that had to be borne but, with the exception of a minority whose health gave out in the first five years, it was not critical. In the next chapter, the physical and economic situation when the settlers took up their blocks will be analysed.
I have just heard a neighbour of ours has to get out and he has only the road to go on with a wife and four little children so I am thinking the Board officials are capable of anything. We are all wondering who is to get notice next and we are in a state where we wonder if it is worth trying any more. The Board will take no notice of us stating the losses we have had and the diseases we have had to fight. One wonders what is going to be the finish. You put one off and another on and in a few years the new one will be as bad off. We see in the papers the salaries the Board members get and then think of what we have to live on, £1 a week in many cases and told to develop our holding which I am doing under almost impossible circumstances and my wife working as hard as I.

PROV, VPRS 748. Box 77 D. J. Crabtree, Elderslie Estate. Lessee to C.S.B.18.8.1930.
Chapter Six

The First Years on the Blocks

The settlement of 13,000 soldiers on the land means the cultivation of tens of thousands of acres of land now under grazing, the populating of areas now sparsely settled, and the bringing up of strong children to maintain the vitality of the race.

*Argus.*¹

I doubt if we could have branched out at a worse period in Australia’s history.

A. Turnbull, soldier settler.²

Introduction

At the conclusion of World War One, Australia’s returning soldiers faced a changing economic environment when they made the transition to civilian life. A number of elements that led to financial problems for significant numbers can be traced to this initial period. The decline in the outlook for soldier settlement was not confined to Victoria but was Australia-wide. The Commonwealth and State governments gave greater emphasis to the economic importance of soldier settlement than they did to the possibility of market fluctuations or the social aspects of repatriation. For returned men on their blocks, the latter factors were more important.

This chapter analyses why the soldier settlers’ initial optimism and dreams of becoming independent small landowners were destroyed almost immediately.

¹ *Argus*, Melbourne, 1.10.1920.
² *PROV, VPRS 748. Box 77, A. Turnbull, Elderslie Estate, lessee to C.S.B., 12.2.20*.
Firstly, the economic and physical situation when the settlers took up their blocks will be briefly examined to show why their initial confidence was misguided. Then the assistance provided to the men will be analysed to illustrate how the necessarily high level of advances and the ‘free period’, coupled with the high price and poor quality of housing and livestock, helped to increase the settlers’ debt levels to unsustainable levels. Several other problems encountered by the settlers including the difficulty of finding profitable commodities to produce, the purchase of unsuitable livestock, difficulties with water and rabbit control will then be addressed. Finally, the decline in commodity prices and the impediments placed in front of settlers who wanted to generate additional income, will be analysed.

The Economic Situation: Short Lived Boom Fuelling Uncalled-for Optimism

The economic, social and political climate that existed in rural Victoria at the end of the war provided a rationale for the soldier settlers’ optimism and faith in their prospects. Rural commodity prices had been rising since before the war and there was a natural expectation that it would take several years for Europe to return to full production. When the first returned men applied for their blocks, prices were at their peak and the Commonwealth and State governments were attempting to exploit the ‘vast resources’ of the country by actively espousing agricultural expansion for patriotic as well as economic reasons. Farmers’ were encouraged

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3 Keneley, *op. cit.*, 1999, Chapter seven.
to increase production to help reduce the high level of public debt caused by
Australia’s involvement in the war.\textsuperscript{5} H. A. Mullett, the chief field officer with the
Victorian Department of Agriculture, conceded that the high prices would not
‘last for ever’ but suggested that farmers should ‘make hay while the sun shines’.\textsuperscript{6}

In 1920, the \textit{Journal of the Department of Agriculture of Victoria} carried a
number of politically motivated articles. These included ‘Increasing Primary
Production’ by D. S. Oman, the Victorian Minister of Agriculture:

\begin{quote}
Another call is being made today for increased production. ... The war has been
won, but the war debt remains to be liquidated. Victoria can best meet her share
of the debt by increasing her production of all primary products, wool, meat,
butter and especially wheat; for increased production of wheat can be effected
more quickly than an increase in meat or in wool. The European production of
wheat has fallen lamentably short of requirements, and as a result prices have
risen rapidly. The present and prospective prices for wheat are so bright that
every Victorian wheat grower should carefully consider and weigh the facts, and
shape his plans to meet the new situation which has arisen.\textsuperscript{7}
\end{quote}

The Minister was wrong about the outlook for rural commodities, as within one
year the prices of wool, meat, butter and wheat had all fallen substantially\textsuperscript{8} and
farmers expanding their production would have lost money. However, established
farmers were able to ‘carefully consider and weigh the facts’ and make their

\textsuperscript{5} H. A. Mullett, ‘Post war reconstruction. How the farmer may help’, \textit{Journal of the
Department of Agriculture of Victoria}, vol. XVIII, April 1920, pp. 211-218. He felt there
was ‘every reason to believe it will last for four or five years’.

\textsuperscript{6} \textit{ibid.}, p. 212.

\textsuperscript{7} D. S. Oman, (Minister of Agriculture) Increasing primary production, \textit{Journal of the

\textsuperscript{8} R. Gillespie Jones, \textit{Graphs of Primary Products, &c., Victoria; 1919-20 to 1943-44},
Government Printer, Melbourne, 1945.
managerial decisions accordingly. Soldier settlers had no choice, they had large mortgages and maximising production was the only option. Increased production among established farmers put additional pressure on the price of livestock at a time when the soldier settlers were competing in the market place. Settlers had barely moved on to their blocks when the downturn in rural commodity prices occurred. In addition, political appeals in a practical journal would not help farmers’ perceptions of the objectivity of its scientific material.

Wheat will pay War debts
Wheat will lift the mortgage.
Wheat will profit the grower
Therefore, plant a record acreage.

Figure. 6.1. Advertisement in *The Journal of the Department of Agriculture of Victoria*. vol. XVIII, April 1920, p. 197.

A large percentage of Australian agricultural production was exported, making Australia vulnerable to changes in international markets.9 ‘Enormous’ stocks of wool, meat and butter remained in storage at the end of the war.10 In Australia, there were expectations that these would be readily sold as Britain and Europe

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returned to peacetime production.\textsuperscript{11} The compulsory acquisition of Australian agricultural production during the war had created artificial demand which diminished significantly when the controls were removed.\textsuperscript{12}

Approximately two million bales of wool had accumulated in London and another eight hundred thousand bales were in storage in Australia by the end of 1920.\textsuperscript{13} Before the war, the annual world consumption of Australian wool was in the region of 1.8 million bales. The worldwide situation was even worse. At the end of July 1921, 2,209,000 bales of carry-over wool remained unsold, including approximately 700,000 bales of Australian wool. It was estimated that the 1921-22 season would yield 2,400,000 bales of Australian wool.\textsuperscript{14} This large accumulated surplus plus the new season’s wool coming onto the market meant that there was no alternative to a fall in price. The price dropped from an average of 15.4 pence per pound in 1919-20 to 12.3 pence per pound in 1921-22, which immediately reduced the profitability of wool growing for soldier settlers.\textsuperscript{15}

While there was a substantial decline in the prices received for wool and subsequently sheep, an even greater fall occurred in the returns from dairy

\textsuperscript{11} ibid.
\textsuperscript{12} ibid., pp. 33 – 35.
\textsuperscript{13} B. Denholm, ‘Some aspects of the transition from war to peace’, \textit{Australian Quarterly}, vol. 16. Issue. 1. March 1944, p. 46.
\textsuperscript{14} Millar Smith, \textit{op. cit.}, 1936, p. 38.
\textsuperscript{15} Davidson, \textit{op. cit.}, 1981, p. 266.
production. Large stocks of butter remained in storage in Britain when price and import controls were lifted in April 1921. In addition, shipments of butter bought under the compulsory purchase scheme continued to arrive in Britain for some months. By December, approximately 20,000 tons of butter in storage was competing with the new season’s output. Consequently, butter fell from twenty-four pence per pound in 1920-21 to thirteen and three quarter pence per pound in 1921-22. This severe price fall was short-lived and the price of butter drifted around sixteen pence per pound for most of the 1920s. One reason for the mediocre prices was that the bulk of the Australian dairy products arrived in Britain in the early part of the year, when European production was at its height and prices were lowest. Finally, the few soldier settlers on country productive enough for breeding fat lambs saw their price drop from a high price of £1-7-6 per head in 1919-20 to eighteen shillings in 1921-22.

The Social and Political Reality: Helping Returned Men while Maximising Personal Profits

To understand the immediate situation facing soldier settlers in South West Victoria when they took up their blocks it is necessary to examine the social and political environment. Political considerations and the excitement among returned

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16 Millar Smith, *op. cit.*, 1936, p. 35.
men and the wider community meant that settlers had to be established quickly. Pryor, writing in 1932, considered that no parliamentarian or public man ever spoke on the question of repatriation without concluding ‘We cannot do too much for these men’.20 As noted earlier, settlers were coming into an established region. While the majority came from the ranks of the farm workers, they were entering a different socio-economic group and would always have a struggle maintaining even the façade of ‘landed independence’.

The estates subdivided for soldier settlement were usually purchased by negotiation or on the open market. Government valuers inspected all properties offered for sale and valued the land according to either ‘the economic prospects of the industry concerned’, the ‘current market value of the land’ or a combination of the two.21 Both these valuation methods had faults. In the first, values based on the economic prospects of the industry were based on the assumption that the prices of agricultural commodities would remain high. The significant fall in the value of most agricultural products ensured that the majority of blocks were overpriced. The rising land prices ensured that valuations based on the ‘current market value of the land’ were frequently adopted.22 Landowners, supported by the Legislative Council, insisted that they have full advantage of any

20 Pryor, op. cit., 1932, p. 16.
rise in the market value of land. Irrespective of the valuation method, soldier settlers paid too much for their land and started farming with a heavy debt burden. Blocks then had to be equipped as individual farms. Settlers had to pay for fences, cow sheds, water supplies, houses and, on some estates, even a percentage of the cost of the roads leading to the block. Debts quickly rose to unsustainable levels.

In 1929, Mr Justice Pike rejected criticism of the price paid for land, concluding that allegations of ‘the purchase of lands at too high a price is shown to be largely without foundation’. In reaching this conclusion, it is probable that he relied on the evidence of the C.S.B. who had already written down the value of Victorian lands by an average of slightly under two per cent. There was already criticism over the losses of the scheme, and the Board would be unlikely to admit that the land had been over-priced thus creating a precedent for soldier settlers wanting compensation. In contrast, the Second Report of the Rural Reconstruction Commission, which provided the blueprint for soldier settlement after World War Two, considered that one of the causes of failure of the earlier scheme was the excessive price of the land. As will be seen in chapter thirteen, there were substantial revaluations of land values in the 1930s, partially due to the Closer Settlement Commission’s realisation that unrealistic prices had been paid.

23 Lomas, op. cit., 1979, p. 546. Land prices had been rising before the war. Also ibid., pp. 516 – 546 for a discussion of the legislation and the successful amendments introduced by graziers in the Legislative Council who wanted to ensure that they received the maximum amount possible for their land.


The Size of Blocks and their Influence on the Economic Viability of the Settlers

The Commonwealth government estimated that 20,000 ex-soldiers would take up blocks, 5,395 of whom were expected to be Victorian. These projections were conservative and over 11,000 returned men became soldier settlers in Victoria. The increased demand reinforced the upward trend in land prices. The rising price per acre, and the ceiling on the prices of individual blocks, meant that the size correspondingly diminished. Lomas has noted that the archaic ‘myth of the yeoman’ was invoked to justify the small size of blocks. Prime Minister Hughes argued that, to meet the demand, farms should be small, ‘relying upon minimum capital but maximum personal labour and intensive production’. The reliance on ‘minimum capital’ did not happen, and capital requirements were substantial. The Royal Commission into Soldier Settlement quoted an important clause in the instructions of the C.S.B. to the Subdivisional Committee:

> In no case should the value of an allotment exceed £2,500, including improvements, and as far as possible the values should be kept at from £1,500 to £2,000, the Board’s Valuer to use his discretion in providing a living area in every case. If, in the opinion of the Subdivisional Committee, the land is mainly grazing and would not of a smaller area [sic] yield a reasonable living for the settler then the value of such allotment may be increased but must not exceed the sum of £3,500.

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28 *ibid*.
29 Royal Commission on Soldier Settlement, 1925, p. 12.
This clause ensured that greater emphasis was placed on the value of the allotment than on the provision of an economically viable living area. Table 6.1 shows the range in the price paid for land in the local region.

Table 6.1. Selected estates where the price per acre can be ascertained, (Estates purchased for less than £6,000 are listed in the C.S.B. Annual Reports by Shire, not by previous owner)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Estate</th>
<th>Acreage No. of Settlers</th>
<th>Average Acreage</th>
<th>Shire</th>
<th>Amount Paid for Estate (£)</th>
<th>Amount paid Per acre (£)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chrome</td>
<td>3,498</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Dundas</td>
<td>10,764</td>
<td>3.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dolmans</td>
<td>753</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Wannon</td>
<td>9,615</td>
<td>12.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elderslie</td>
<td>36,906</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Kowree</td>
<td>108,875</td>
<td>2.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glenorchy</td>
<td>12,474</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Glenelg &amp; Portland</td>
<td>93,575</td>
<td>7.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greenhills</td>
<td>5,330</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Minhamite</td>
<td>41,137</td>
<td>7.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gringegalgona</td>
<td>29,641</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Wannon</td>
<td>90,546</td>
<td>3.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hensley Park</td>
<td>3,963</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Dundas</td>
<td>29,722</td>
<td>7.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hilgay</td>
<td>6,686</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Wannon</td>
<td>70,207</td>
<td>10.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knebsworth</td>
<td>2,500</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Minhamite</td>
<td>23,344</td>
<td>9.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kongbool</td>
<td>5,449</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Wannon</td>
<td>12,260</td>
<td>2.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Konongwootong Nth</td>
<td>11,130</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Wannon</td>
<td>71,549</td>
<td>6.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korongah</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Belfast</td>
<td>28,507</td>
<td>57.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murndal</td>
<td>696</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Dundas</td>
<td>10,409</td>
<td>14.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nangeela</td>
<td>3,057</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Glenelg</td>
<td>33,927</td>
<td>11.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Struan</td>
<td>4,613</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Glenelg</td>
<td>75,576</td>
<td>16.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tahara</td>
<td>1,203</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Glenelg &amp; Portland</td>
<td>22,603</td>
<td>18.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toolong</td>
<td>337</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Belfast</td>
<td>7,768</td>
<td>23.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trangnars</td>
<td>452</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Wannon</td>
<td>7,906</td>
<td>17.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warrong</td>
<td>23,223</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>Minhamite</td>
<td>158,693</td>
<td>6.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wollaston</td>
<td>686</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Warrnambool</td>
<td>37,769</td>
<td>55.06</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Where the size of the block had constituted a living area when the Estate was subdivided, the fall in the commodity prices soon adversely affected its ability to support the settler and his family. In 1920, one of the first annual reports of the
C.S.B. noted that ‘Great care is necessary in this work to see that every block constitutes a living area and that the relative prices of the blocks are correct’.\textsuperscript{30} Within a few years, very few blocks contained a living area. The wish to keep the relative prices similar led to a wide differentiation in the size of blocks. The quality of individual blocks, even within the one Estate, could vary enormously. The variation in the size of blocks on Warrong, which consisted of sixty blocks on 23,223 acres\textsuperscript{31}, (Figure 6.2) illustrates the point.

Figure 6.2. Size of blocks on Warrong Estate. Mean = 369 acres.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{Figure6.2.png}
\caption{Size of blocks on Warrong Estate. Mean = 369 acres.}
\end{figure}


These differences in land quality were reflected in the price paid per acre for the blocks. The average price paid per acre was £8.57 while the range was between £3.55 and £22.89. When applications were opened for Warrong estate, fifty-five


blocks were originally allocated with no applications for the other seven. *The Warrnambool Standard* reported that ‘there were numerous applications for particular blocks’.\(^\text{32}\) Prospective settlers had done their own assessment of the quality of the blocks on offer. Irrespective of the variation, the majority were soon too small to be economically viable.

Block sizes varied greatly between Estates. The largest blocks were approximately one thousand acres on Elderslie, in the far north west of the region, and the smallest between thirty and forty acres on Korongah and Wollaston near Warrnambool.\(^\text{33}\) These would have had to be land of exceptional quality to justify the high prices and the small acreage allocated. Keneley has examined the two estates, concluding that the blocks were all uneconomically small, irrespective of their quality.\(^\text{34}\) In some cases, the size of the blocks in an area was constrained by what the landowners’ would sell. The Soldier Settlement Act provided for compulsory acquisition but the threat was usually sufficient to persuade reluctant landholders to sell parts of their runs at the prevailing high prices. Mr. W. McIver the Chairman of the C.S.B. admitted to the Royal Commission that ‘threats of

\(^{32}\) ibid.

\(^{33}\) Lomas has provided a discussion of the proceedings surrounding the purchase of these estates. Lomas, *op. cit.*, 1979, p. 367.

\(^{34}\) Keneley, *op. cit.*, 1999, p. 184.
compulsion were frequently used and these had the desired effect’.35 This did not always occur and where the landowner refused to sell the C.S.B. did not persist.36

When Mr Justice Pike stated that the price paid for the land was not too high, he did not address what percentage of the blocks were actually suitable for soldier settlement.37 In 1936, Gordon Taylor writing in the Economic Record considered that the proportion of suitable land purchased ‘must have been very low’.38 Keneley has noted that in 1900 on at least four stations, the ‘system of management was to expend as little as possible and simply draw receipts from the property’.39 Two of these estates, Glenorchy and part of Konongwootong, were later purchased for soldier settlement. Understandably, this ‘system of management’ led to a massive increase in the rabbit population and the trustees were fined for not destroying the rabbits.40 The quality of land acquired for soldier settlement in the region indicates that other owners or trustees may have adopted similar strategies.

35 ibid., p. 12.
38 ibid., p. 62.
40 ibid.
The Second Report of the Rural Reconstruction Commission noted that the C.S.B. had been persuaded to buy unsuitable land by

the job-seeker, the land-seller seeking a profit, the badly informed self-styled patriot, or local interests thinking selfishly in terms of the number of men settled and the amount of the money spent in the district, instead of the number of men who can be settled successfully in the district.41

Lake has described the Hamilton soldier settlers as having ‘good land’.42 The history of South West Victoria demonstrates that the land was not necessarily ‘good’ for the purposes of soldier settlement, without extensive improvement. Throughout Victoria, the situation was the same; a significant number of returned men received land that was never going to be suitable for closer settlement.

Settlers Moving on to Their Blocks

Peter Yule has described how three excited returned soldiers borrowed a buggy to go and inspect their new blocks on Warrong Estate and found that they were ‘unfenced, unimproved and infested with rabbits’.43 The higher blocks on Warrong were all ‘rabbits and bracken’ while the smaller blocks on lower land were covered with ‘tussocks and rabbits’.44 This scenario, with variations, would be repeated throughout the region as returned soldiers inspected and selected their blocks. The cutting up of large estates increased the likelihood that blocks would

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42 Lake, op. cit., 1987, p. 113.
44 ibid., p. 110.
be partially or totally unfenced. The absence of numerous men at the front curtailed much non-essential farm work during the war years. This labour shortage would affect the soldier settlers as much of the sub-divided land was heavily infested with rabbits\(^45\) and any existing infrastructure was often in need of repair. If the property was ‘run down’, it helped landowners make the decision to sell to the C.S.B.

It is possible to empathise with these men as they inspected their blocks, initially full of excitement and confidence in the future. Even returned soldiers who had been wounded, gassed or shell-shocked started with a degree of enthusiasm and saw soldier settlement as an opportunity to better themselves. A number would probably receive a different shock on seeing their blocks. However, they had survived the ‘war to end all wars’ and taming an inhospitable environment would be another challenge to be faced and dealt with in its turn. Within a short period, they would be facing disillusion, increasing and uncontrollable debts and an uncertain future. How this change occurred on a local level will be explored below.

In order to survive, soldier settlers had to maximise their returns per acre. This intensification of settlement put a far greater demand on the environment than had previously been required. The changes also contributed to the risks of failure, as

\(^{45}\) See below for a discussion of the problems caused by rabbits, especially PROV, VPRS 748. Box 2. L. Allan, Hilgay Estate, lessee to C.S.B., 3.5.24.
the outcomes were unpredictable. To have any hope of success, it was usually necessary for soldier settlers to change the character of the land. This involved ‘changing aspects of the environment such as water supply, soils and vegetation’.46 The changes were expensive and long-term operations. Until the blocks had improved pastures, adequate water supplies and stock and rabbit proof fencing, soldier settlers would remain in danger of failure. Pasture improvement in the region started slowly with settlers encouraged by their inspectors to produce more fodder for their livestock. Over the long-term, this change in the environment ‘ultimately helped to create far more farms out of the old pastoral runs than any legislation’.47 However, successful pasture improvement was expensive and difficult.48

As will be discussed in chapter eight, the use of superphosphate was becoming more common in the grasslands by 1920. The first soldier settlers to use superphosphate considered the expense unjustified in the poor economic climate of the early 1920s.49 While this was valid at that time, the continued use of superphosphate and subterranean clover50 ultimately lifted production in the


47 ibid.

48 Pasture development will be addressed in chapter eight.

49 ibid.

50 A valuable pasture legume. See Appendix One: Glossary.
Western District until properties that had been running less than one dry sheep equivalent (DSE) per acre were running over four.\footnote{For a discussion of the concept of dry sheep equivalents, see Appendix One: Glossary.}

Soldier settlers’ financial situations did not allow them to take a long-term approach to farm development and the major lift in productivity did not occur until the 1950s. Settlers had limited financial resources and large debts; therefore their main task was to maximise their profitability. The C.S.B. and local inspectors directed soldier settlers into what they perceived to be the most profitable farming enterprises. However, to attempt to grow commodities purely based on their projected return, without adequate consideration of the physical factors involved, was usually counterproductive.

The three Warrong settlers began dairying but they would have to wait over a year before they got any returns from this venture.\footnote{Yule, \textit{op. cit.}, 1988, p. 110.} A lot of work had to be carried out before holdings could even be stocked. The settlers’ first task would be to find somewhere to live until their homes were built. Boundary fences would have to be constructed to keep the settler’s stock in, and the neighbours’ stock out. If, like the Warrong men, they were planning to engage in dairying, a rudimentary milking shed and yards would be required. Many of the blocks had inadequate water storage, a problem that would have to be addressed
immediately.\footnote{Paradoxically, it is possible that the same blocks were waterlogged in the winter months.} Introducing livestock to the block was not feasible until these tasks were completed. When the initial developmental work was finished, there was still the ubiquitous rabbit to be eradicated.

*Establishment Problems and the Cost of Infrastructure*

A number of settlers urgently needed external infrastructure when they went onto their blocks. On a big estate like Warrong, access roads had to be constructed.\footnote{Victorian Parliamentary Debates, Legislative Assembly, vol. 164, 1923, p. 118.} This was a common situation on large estates throughout Victoria. During the winter months, the Western District climate curtailed the settlers’ progress.

When a big squatting estate is sub divided, as soon as the roads are laid out through the original paddocks they become quagmires and wagons and drays get bogged. In those circumstances it is impossible for the soldiers to take their produce off the estates for the main road.\footnote{ibid.}

The situation on the block was similar, if the roads were ‘quagmires’, paddocks were unlikely to be much drier. Several settlers did not even have a road frontage and were dependent on the generosity of their neighbours to get themselves and their livestock in and out.\footnote{Elderslie settlers without a road frontage include Peter McBain (Interview with his widow, Naracoorte, June 1995) and Murdoch Campbell (Interview with his daughter Miss Josie Campbell, Edenhope, July 1995).} This movement of livestock would help spread animal diseases between properties. All weather road access was essential with dairy farming as cream had to be delivered to the local butter factory on a regular basis.
The problems with roads were ongoing and the inspector on Hilgay Estate near Coleraine concluded in 1925 that ‘the settlers on this Estate have had grave difficulties owing to the bad state of the roads here and I am sure that when this is remedied, things will improve’.\footnote{PROV, VPRS 748. Box 74, H. A. Hill, Hilgay Estate, inspector to C.S.B., 29.6.25.} In some districts, new bridges were necessary to give settlers access to towns, butter factories and schools. In addition to their poor roads, the Hilgay settlers attempted to obtain a bridge over the Wannon river in order to cut the distance from the estate to Coleraine by ten and half miles.\footnote{Coleraine Albion, 5.3.1925.} This would help in transporting cream to the butter factory and provide greater educational opportunities for the children. The settlers had wanted the bridge from the time they took up their blocks but nothing had been done by 1928.\footnote{ibid., 29.11.28.}

The provisions of the Soldier Settlement Act ensured that settlers paid a percentage of the cost of external infrastructure. The overall indebtedness of the settlers on Warrong Estate in the Minhamite Shire was increased by £6,500 to pay for road construction and sub-division. This was not enough to enable the shire to complete the work and many of the soldier settlers were unable to get out to the main road. The shire did not want to tax all the landowners in the district to pay for access roads and applied unsuccessfully to the state government for an extra £4,800 to complete the work.\footnote{Yule, \textit{op. cit.}, 1988, p. 118.}
It was unfair to load soldier settlement estates with the costs of essential services. As Powell points out in *A Historical Geography of Modern Australia* perhaps this work should have been seen as a ‘national investment’ in the future prosperity of the nation. As such, the cost would have been borne by the nation as a whole, not by individual settlers. It was generally agreed that all Australians gained from a prosperous rural sector. The Hughes and later Bruce-Page governments were both committed to national development, especially in the rural sphere. W. M. Hughes stated in 1921 that

> if you put one man on the land, he provides a job for one man, and probably for two men in the city. If we attend to the first part, the other will adjust itself.

Consequently, it would be reasonable to expect the Commonwealth government to finance all the necessary infrastructure in a development project like soldier settlement. While soldier settlement was administered at the State level, the majority of the finance was provided by the Commonwealth.

The Commonwealth did provide a percentage of the road costs but the settlers had to pay the rest. The amount of additional debt added to the settlers’ accounts to meet the cost of the subdivision and essential infrastructure was substantial. The usual division of the cost was three-quarters paid for by the state and one quarter

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as a loading on the estate. Poor roads were to remain a constant throughout the Hamilton district during the early years of soldier settlement. Local councils were reluctant to increase their rates to assist one section of the community, even if they were returned soldiers.

Assistance for Soldier Settlers: ‘Sustenance’ and a ‘Free Period’

The Qualification Certificates analysed in chapter five showed that the majority of settlers had limited financial assets. In the light of this, the architects of the soldier settlement scheme recognised that settlers would need short-term financial assistance. Therefore, they were able to receive a special ‘sustenance allowance’ for the first six months on their blocks. The allowance consisted of £1 for single men and up to £2 for a married man with four children. This was necessary, as they would not earn any immediate income from farming. Several settlers applied to the C.S.B. for an extra period of ‘sustenance’ after the initial six months. One of these was P. King of Warrong who considered that it would take more than six months before he received any returns from his wool and crops. The only soldier settlers to receive any immediate income, other than their ‘sustenance allowance’, were those in receipt of pensions. Woolgrowers or mixed farmers could wait up to eighteen months before they received any income. For example, a settler could buy bare-shorn sheep, which would be cheaper. He would then

63 PROV, VPRS 10240. vol. 7, Minutes of the C.S.B., 10.5.23.
65 PROV, VPRS 748. Box 89, P. King, Warrong Estate, lessee to C.S.B., 15.7.21.
have to wait twelve months until they could be shorn. Wool was auctioned in the order it was received at the store; therefore it was often another six months before it was sold.

A moratorium on payments of principal and interest was granted for up to three years until the settlers were established.\textsuperscript{66} However this was merely a postponement of interest payments, not an interest free period. The interest debt started to accumulate from the day the men went onto their blocks. By the time the moratorium was finished, commodity prices had fallen considerably while the cost of farm inputs had been higher than expected. This made it increasingly difficult for soldier settlers to meet their commitments. Within a short time, the majority were substantially in arrears, a condition that was to continue for many years.

The Royal Commissioners conceded that it was unreasonable for soldier settlers to be expected to earn enough to meet five per cent interest on the total value of the land, improvements and equipment during the ‘free period’.\textsuperscript{67} However, this was not a universally accepted view. When the losses rose to alarming levels in the late 1920s and 1930s, the ‘free period’ was cited as one of the causes of the heavy indebtedness. Taylor suggested in 1936 that this moratorium ‘was demoralising and gave an undesirable sense of freedom from obligation to the

\textsuperscript{66} Royal Commission on Soldier Settlement, 1925, p. 8.

\textsuperscript{67} ibid., p. 17.
settlements’. The Herald and The Age had adopted this opinion earlier in the 1930s.

After World War Two, the planners of soldier settlement decided that the settler should ‘be able to walk before he was asked to run’. With this in mind, the latter group of settlers only paid a ‘nominal rent’ on their blocks until ‘the boundary fences were completed, a satisfactory water supply was in place, [and] the rabbits and noxious needs were under control’. No stock was to be carried on the blocks until the land was developed sufficiently and settlers had to build up their flocks gradually to give the new pastures time to consolidate. Contrast this to the situation after World War One where settlers were criticised by the press for not making capital and interest payments immediately they went onto their blocks. In 1930, The Age concluded that:

Granting these men land free of a deposit, and conceding them a free period for two, and in some cases three, years proved a disastrous mistake. They did not gain the sense of proprietorship which the ordinary land purchaser does directly he sinks his first deposit in his venture. Nothing to lose and everything to gain.

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71 ibid., p. 50.
72 ibid., p. 73.
did not provide the necessary incentive for them to work and improve their block.73

The writer and other critics showed a lack of understanding of the processes involved in starting up a farming enterprise. Initial development work took time, as well as costing money. Farming is a long-term operation, and few farming situations exist where income would be received immediately.

*Local Committees*

Further assistance was provided to soldier settlers by local committees, created in 1919 to assist in the purchase of land and getting the settlers established. These volunteers were expected to do a difficult and time-consuming job on behalf of the State. They were under pressure from graziers wanting to sell them land, returned soldiers wanting to be settled quickly and the C.S.B. which wanted to ensure that the whole scheme worked efficiently. The conflicts inherent in attempting to serve several masters soon became apparent. The *Warrnambool Standard* reported in 1920 that the local committees had put in a lot of work on land valuations and recommendations for purchasing estates for soldier settlement.74 They were not paid for their work and resented the fact that outside valuers’ arrived on brief visits and the C.S.B. took notice of the latter while ignoring the local knowledge.

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73 *The Age, op. cit.*, 18.10.1930.
74 *Warrnambool Standard*, 6.4.1920, p. 3.
This policy of using volunteer committees combined with salaried valuers often created delays.\textsuperscript{75} Taylor has suggested that the lobbying of the various conflicting interests ‘possibly did not result in only the best land being purchased’.\textsuperscript{76} Lomas has also documented how the lobbying led to ‘cursory inspections, payment of high prices and purchase of unsuitable land’.\textsuperscript{77} In fairness to the local committees, the higher than expected demand for land ensured the probability that a substantial acreage of the land purchased would be inferior in quality.

One possible advantage for soldier settlers in the use of local committees was the latter’s tendency to side with them against the C.S.B.\textsuperscript{78} This was to be expected when committee members were negotiating between local personalities and unknown city administrators. When a settler wanted an advance to buy an item of equipment, there would be a natural tendency to assist the ‘digger’ by granting the request. Initially, there was a feeling of optimism in the farming community due to the previous high prices. It seemed reasonable to assume that soldier settlers would share in the profitable times. Some settlers were criticised for making extravagant purchases. The economic downturn meant that quite sensible purchases could later be described as extravagant. Possibly, there were soldier settlers who overcapitalised their properties in the initial period of optimism.

\textsuperscript{75} ibid.
\textsuperscript{76} Taylor, \textit{op. cit.}, 1936, p. 61.
\textsuperscript{77} Lomas, \textit{op. cit.}, 1979, p. 558.
\textsuperscript{78} Lake, \textit{op. cit.}, 1987, p. 68.
However, a study of the lists of purchases in the Advances Files does not reveal many extravagant or unnecessary items.\textsuperscript{79} Up until the end of 1922, D. McDonald of Hilgay had typical advances and these are listed in Table 6.2.

Table 6.2. Advances for D. McDonald, Hilgay Estate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12 cows @ £4-10-0 each</td>
<td>£54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two horses @ £17</td>
<td>£34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cart</td>
<td>£20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Set of harness</td>
<td>£15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separator</td>
<td>£15-10-0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plough</td>
<td>£20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two tons of fencing wire</td>
<td>£47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three roomed house</td>
<td>£290</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>£495-10-0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: PROV, VPRS 748, Box 98, D. McDonald, Advances file, 6.2.22.

In 1920, the C.S.B. stated that the local committees provided valuable assistance during the purchase of Estates, in advising on the purchase of stock and implements, and the best methods of working the farms.\textsuperscript{80} Since a significant number of settlers were sold unsuitable livestock and were forced to change enterprises within a short space of time, it is reasonable to assume that these Committees were not always as useful as suggested.\textsuperscript{81} Within the first year, local

\textsuperscript{79} PROV, VPRS 748. Lists of items purchased with advances for soldier settlers in the Hamilton Administrative district.


\textsuperscript{81} See below and chapter nine: Maximising Profits Without Considering the Consequences. Soldier Settlers as Dairy Farmers.
committees were replaced by district inspectors and supervisors employed by the C.S.B.\textsuperscript{82}

\textit{Advances for Purchasing Livestock and other Requirements}

It was originally intended that advances to buy stock and plant should be limited to £500. The Victorian government wanted to lift the level to £750 and approached Prime Minister Hughes. He replied that the states should ‘direct their energies rather to small holdings than to large ones for which the advance might be deemed insufficient’.\textsuperscript{83} Since the majority of soldier settlers had uneconomically small farms, Hughes’ reply shows a lack of awareness of the economic situation faced by farmers. The final figure agreed to was £625.

Changes in government policies at the end of the war, including the removal of price controls, led to rising prices for farm requisites. The shift from wartime to peacetime production ensured that settlers had to contend with disruptions in supply. The large number of farmers to be established on newly sub-divided blocks meant demand for building materials, fencing materials and other necessities outstripped supply, putting further upward pressure on prices. When Mr Justice Pike reported on the mounting losses of soldier settlement he found that, when the soldier settlers were establishing their blocks in 1919 – 1921

\textsuperscript{82} \textit{Documentary evidence of district inspectors started to appear within the first few months. However, for a short period, both local committees and inspectors assisted soldier settlers.}

\textsuperscript{83} \textit{Lomas, \textit{op. cit.}, 1979, p. 531.}
some of the main items needed for carrying out improvements - namely fencing wire, fencing, posts, etc - being over 300% above either their pre-war or present prices.\textsuperscript{84}

These high prices meant that settlers’ debts became far greater than had been anticipated when the scheme was planned. To make matters worse, settlers were still paying for these materials when the prices had declined again.

Soldier settlers had no alternative to buying requirements at inflated prices. These high prices had an immediate and long lasting effect on the profitability of their holdings. Arthur Bond of Warrong put in for the maximum amount allowable for fencing expenses, although he hoped to erect his fences for much less.\textsuperscript{85} Bond had budgeted on spending £200 on fencing but the actual cost was approximately £390. He unsuccessfully applied for another advance of £175.\textsuperscript{86} Bond wrote to the C.S.B. hoping to have the decision reversed because

\begin{quote}
I am sorry to say I am in a hopeless position unless I can obtain the advances applied for. In fact the case is worse than hopeless as I have purchased and used a good deal of the wire and built a cowshed out of the timber I bought. ... As I have just about reached the end of my own capital it means that I must get out if I can’t settle up with VPC.\textsuperscript{87} ... I have done my utmost to make my place pay and in spite of the adverse conditions, I have made a little money which I have put into stock.\textsuperscript{88}
\end{quote}

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{84} Mr Justice Pike, \textit{op. cit.}, 1929, p. 20.
\textsuperscript{85} PROV, VPRS 748. Box 13, A. Bond, Warrong Estate, lessee to C.S.B., 11.4.21.
\textsuperscript{86} \textit{ibid.}, C.S.B. to lessee. 28.9.21.
\textsuperscript{87} A stock and station Agent. It is inferred that they had advanced him money, probably on a six month Bill, to buy livestock. Bond was afraid that VPC would foreclose if he could not pay for the livestock.
\textsuperscript{88} \textit{ibid.}, lessee to C.S.B., 10.10.21.
\end{footnotes}
By June 1922, the final price of his home had risen to £481 and the C.S.B. had, belatedly, allowed his advances to rise to £787-10-4. Bond went onto his block with assets of £100 plus twelve shillings a fortnight pension. The cost of his fencing and home took up his most of his advances and capital; therefore, he had to finance his livestock privately. The Royal Commission into Soldier Settlement concluded that in ‘almost all departments of soldier settlement these amounts [ie advances] have been inadequate’ due to the high price of farm inputs. It would have been far better for the settlers if price controls had continued until 1922, when most would have been established. Attempts to give the Commonwealth adequate powers to deal with post-war problems, including the continuation of price controls, were defeated at a referendum in 1919 and settlers faced the full brunt of market forces.

Since a majority of soldier settlers had previously been farm labourers, £625 was a considerable sum for men who would never have had more than their wages to spend at any given time. A significant number of settlers applied to the C.S.B.

89 ibid., C.S.B. to lessee. 1.6.22.
90 Royal Commission on Soldier Settlement, 1925, p. 53.
91 Price controls were established under the War Precautions Act of 1914.
93 ibid., pp. 40-41.
94 McQuilton, in Heathcote (ed) op. cit., 1988, ‘Wages paid to rural labourers ... ranging from £1 to £1-5-0 per week.’
for further advances. W. A. Cotter of Nangeela was married with one child when he took up his block. He had to rent a house for his wife and child in Casterton for the first year, which meant he was unable to undertake dairying. His only income was his wool clip of £78-1-9. He unsuccessfully applied to the C.S.B. to keep all of it. Table 6.3 lists his advances up to March 1921.

Table 6.3. Breakdown of advances for W. A. Cotter, Nangeela Estate

| Description                      | Amount  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>House (transported to the site)</td>
<td>£420</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harness</td>
<td>£15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implements</td>
<td>£45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horse</td>
<td>£15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheep</td>
<td>£130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>£625</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: PROV, VPRS 748, Box 105, W. A. Cotter, Record of Advances, 23.3.21.

Nothing was unusual or extravagant in Cotter’s advances except the price of the house, which seems high for a second-hand dwelling.

While there were settlers who found the £625 rigidly adhered to by the C.S.B., others, such as Percy Virgo of Elderslie, received considerably more money. He applied for total advances of £952-16-0 through the Casterton Local Committee and considered that nothing could be cut out. The committee approved his

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95 Report of the Royal Commission on Soldier Settlement, 1925, p. 15.
96 PROV, VPRS 748. Box 105, W. A. Cotter, Nangeela Estate.
97 *ibid.*, lessee to C.S.B., 5.11.21. Dairying was a family-oriented task in which his wife would also be expected to milk cows.
98 *ibid.*, Wool returns. 30.5.21.
99 PROV, VPRS 748. Box 6, P. Virgo, Elderslie Estate.
request. However, there does not seem to be anything unreasonable in his record of advances. (Table 6.4.) The Architects Branch fixed the quality and size of the homes provided. Fencing materials and livestock were both expensive.

Table 6.4. List of major farm requirements submitted by the Casterton Local Committee for P. Virgo, Elderslie Estate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>House</td>
<td>£380-0-0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fencing materials</td>
<td>£100-0-0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring cart</td>
<td>£15-0-0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harness</td>
<td>£10-0-0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implements and tools</td>
<td>£10-0-0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheep</td>
<td>£399-6-0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>£914-6-0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: PROV, VPRS 748. Box 6, P. Virgo, Casterton Local Committee to C.S.B. 17.8.22.

The Casterton committee wrote to the C.S.B. again, pointing out that £625 in advances was insufficient. It considered that Virgo needed to spend money on three main things, stock, fencing and housing. All were essential and it estimated that settlers would expect to pay £300 - 400 for their home and up to £600 for stock and fencing. The C.S.B. at this stage was prepared to make allowances for settlers in need of further advances:

> It is considered that settlers have been given such valuable areas with a two year free period they should, after being given advances, say up to £800, be able to obtain credit for further stock required.  

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100 ibid., Casterton Local Committee to C.S.B., 31.5.20.
101 ibid., Subsequently approved by the C.S.B. This list did not include wire netting. In 1922, Virgo applied for a further advance for this because the ‘rabbits keep coming in by the hundred’. lessee to C.S.B., 17.8.22.
102 ibid., Casterton Local Committee to C.S.B., 16.6.20.
103 ibid., C.S.B. to Casterton Local Committee. 22.6.20.
The Board held a first mortgage over the block and if the settler defaulted, it would be paid first. Initially outside debts were not regarded as a problem. However, in later years, the C.S.B. became opposed to settlers obtaining finance from stock agents and banks.

Problems Associated with the High Cost and Poor Quality of Housing

One of the most expensive and urgent items required by soldier settlers was a home. As noted earlier, it was not unusual for the settler to live in a tent on the block while his wife and family rented accommodation in a nearby town. This was unsatisfactory. The settler had additional expense and there was a natural tendency for him to want to spend weekends with his wife. It was impossible for the wife to help on the farm if she was living in town.

The rise in the cost of materials and labour ensured that settlers’ homes cost far more than anticipated. In 1930, the Hamilton Spectator reported that settlers had been told that two roomed houses would be priced at £80 per room. This did not occur, and basic dwellings cost substantially more. In the first two years, one settler received bills of £180 for his house, then a final bill for £323 at the end of the third year. Finally, he had £23 written off the total cost of £503.

104 Coleraine Albion, 30.10.1919.
105 ‘Big meeting of Soldier settlers at Hamilton’, Hamilton Spectator, 18.12.1930, p. 8. Mr. Docherty of Glenorchy Estate was reported as considering that nothing could be done as it was ‘just a Government messing about’. See also Report of the Royal Commission on Soldier Settlement, Minority Report, p. 55.
The Royal Commission into Soldier Settlement considered that in many cases the houses were so dear as to ‘suggest gross neglect by the Architect’s Branch which was responsible for the work’. The C.S.B. made the excuse that the settlers should have supervised the work but it was reported to the Commissioners that when settlers tried to advise the builders they were told to mind their own business.\textsuperscript{107} Wiltshire, in the Minority Report of the Royal Commission, used the example of a soldier settler near Casterton who was quoted £75 to place a second hand house (purchase price £70) on his block.\textsuperscript{108} This quotation was rejected by the Architect’s Branch, which sent nine carpenters to carry out the work. They took three and a half months and the final cost to the settler was approximately £370 for a second hand house. When the settler wrote to the architect, he was told to ‘keep my nose out of his business or I would fare very much worse in future’. This settler’s advances were £200 more than necessary through no fault of his own.

Soldier settlers made numerous complaints about the poor quality of their homes. In 1921, the Architect’s Branch stated that the value of W. H. Leach’s house on Warrong should not exceed £175. When the building was completed, the lessee discovered that his house had actually cost £250. This sum had been paid out of Leach’s advances. In this instance, the Board kept its books in order by


transferring £120 of this sum onto the capital value of the block to decrease the level of advances.\textsuperscript{109} Leach was still expected to pay the inflated price for his dwelling; the only change was in the book entries. In 1923, Inspector Harrison inspected Leach’s house and reported to the C.S.B.: ‘Small house on allotment unsafe, recent windstorms having canted it over so that props had to be used to hold it up’.\textsuperscript{110} If Leach’s dwelling was structurally unsafe after only two years, then even the original £175 was too expensive. E. Moore, also of Warrong, applied unsuccessfully to the Board for £50 to line the back room ‘as the rain constantly beats in, no matter how tight you keep the boards, and runs everywhere in the room’.\textsuperscript{111} When the Royal Commission visited Coleraine in 1925, there were various complaints about the cost and quality of the housing and it was reported that two chimneys had collapsed on Struan Estate.\textsuperscript{112}

The issue of housing should also be considered from the perspective of the wives and families who had to live in the homes. Life was hard for a soldier settler’s wife at any time, but to have your house either falling down or letting the rain in would have been difficult to tolerate. The Commission concluded that all the houses in the state were too dear but those in the Western District were the most

\textsuperscript{109} PROV, VPRS 748. Box 92, W. H. Leach, Warrong Estate, C.S.B. to lessee, 13.9.21.

\textsuperscript{110} \textit{ibid.}, Joint report by Inspector Harrison and M. Hager, 8.11.23.

\textsuperscript{111} PROV, VPRS 748. Box 8, E. Moore, Warrong Estate, lessee to C.S.B., 1.6.28.

\textsuperscript{112} \textit{Coleraine Albion}, 18.6.1925.
expensive. The high cost of housing was one of several factors which helped push settlers into arrears.

_Labour Costs_

Labour was in short supply in the country during the early 1920s and therefore expensive. For example, the price of shearing went up thirty-three per cent, from thirty shillings per hundred sheep in 1918-19 to forty shillings in 1920-21. Farm labourers’ wages also rose from thirty-three shillings and eight pence per week in 1918-19 to forty one shillings in 1920-21.

Soldier settlers were discouraged from employing labour so, theoretically, rising labour costs should not have affected them. ‘Pink’ form reports contained a question on labour, which summed up the Board’s attitude to the subject. ‘Did lessee employ labour? If so, was it really necessary?’ In grazing and mixed farming situations, inexperienced settlers found that shearing was a specialised job and that they needed to hire assistance at shearing time. Initially, some single settlers, and those in poor health, were forced to hire labour. As they married, had families and the children grew up, they would have sons and

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114 Davidson, _op. cit._, 1981, p. 266.
115 _ibid._
116 In the first year the Elderslie settlers hired a shearing contractor and used a large local shed as a depot. See PROV, VPRS 5714. Box 1146, (This box contains a miscellaneous collection of files relating to Elderslie.)
daughters to help with the work. This assistance would not be available for a number of years.

Single men on dairy farms would have found it necessary to hire somebody to help with the milking.\textsuperscript{117} The \textit{Journal of the Department of Agriculture of Victoria} estimated that twelve cows were ‘as many as one man can efficiently attend to’.\textsuperscript{118} Davidson\textsuperscript{119} has noted that sixteen cows was the maximum that an individual could milk by hand but points out that twenty to twenty five cows was what was aimed for in establishing the acreage of soldier settlement farms.\textsuperscript{120} With this number of cows, additional labour would usually be required.

When soldier settlers married, their wives became an integral part of the farm operation. A number took over the running of the farm when the settler was ill, absent from the block or deceased.\textsuperscript{121} It is difficult to do more than tentatively assess the contribution of soldier settlers’ wives. Some like Mrs M. Campbell\textsuperscript{122}

\begin{flushleft}
\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{119} Davidson, \textit{op. cit.}, 1981, p. 270. This was not strictly true as J. E. Hindaugh from Warrong Estate was described as milking 33 cows himself in 1925. (PROV, VPRS 748. Box 74) This was an exception and Hindaugh was described ‘as one of the best farmers in the area’. ‘pink’ form report. 20.3.25)
\item \textsuperscript{120} Davidson, \textit{op. cit.}, 1981, p. 288.
\item \textsuperscript{121} See PROV, VPRS 748. Box 87, M. Kelly, Korongah Estate.
\item \textsuperscript{122} From interview with her daughter Miss Josie Campbell \textit{op. cit.}
\end{itemize}
\end{flushleft}
of Elderslie or Mrs R. Kelly\textsuperscript{123} of Korongah did most of the work on the farm due to their husbands’ illnesses.

\textbf{Purchase of Unsuitable Livestock by Soldier Settlers}

After the settler had built his boundary fences and erected a dwelling, he had to stock the block. This was potentially an expensive and frustrating exercise. Prices rose due to competition from the large number of soldier settlers trying to purchase their livestock and there was always the possibility of buying unsuitable animals. The C.S.B. attempted to address this problem. It reported that ‘All stock supplied to a settler must be first inspected and passed either by a member of the Local Shire Committee or an Inspector of the Board’.\textsuperscript{124} This should have provided protection for soldier settlers but a large number of poor quality livestock was purchased, suggesting that the reality was somewhat different to the Board’s ideal.

Soldier settlers sold sub-standard dairy cows could have been the victims of improvements in farm management techniques. The widespread adoption of herd testing in Victoria meant that for the first time dairy farmers had a scientific method of culling their unproductive cows.\textsuperscript{125} Soldier settlers were forced to buy

\textsuperscript{123} PROV, VPRS 748 Box 87. M. Kelly, Korongah Estate.

\textsuperscript{124} Report of the Closer Settlement Board for the year ended 30th June, 1920, p. 5.

\textsuperscript{125} See chapter nine. The Herd Testing movement was commenced in Victoria in 1921 when the average production of butter fat was 140 lbs. By 1928 the average production of butter fat had grown to 190 lbs. Report of the Royal Commission on the Dairy Industry, \textit{Victorian Parliamentary Papers}, Government Printer, Melbourne, Appendix B, 1928, p. 21.
whatever stock was available, ensuring that established farmers got a good price for their poor producers, many of which should have been sold as ‘choppers’ for slaughter.\textsuperscript{126} It was reported that some cows sold to soldier settlers were beef instead of dairy breeds.\textsuperscript{127}

Mr Justice Pike considered that the circumstances surrounding the setting up of the soldier settlement scheme created

\[
\text{a fictitiously high price which had to be paid as it was absolutely necessary that those settlers who had been placed on dairying propositions should be immediately supplied with the means of making a livelihood.}\textsuperscript{128}
\]

In hindsight, this was a questionable conclusion. While it was desirable for settlers to commence farming immediately, there was little value in them buying livestock that would never enable them to make a livelihood.

The Local Committees and inspectors who assisted the settlers with their purchases must bear much of the blame for the purchase of unsuitable livestock. Settlers should not have been blamed for falling behind in their payments when they had been instructed to buy unprofitable livestock at considerable personal expense.

\textsuperscript{126} See Figure 8.1 chapter nine for the differences in productivity between tested and untested cows. Choppers are aged, often poor quality cattle, suitable for the grinding meat trade.

\textsuperscript{127} Rural Reconstruction Commission, Second Report, \textit{op. cit.}, 1944, p. 1. These cows could be expected to be poor milk producers, unsuitable for the dairy industry.

\textsuperscript{128} Pike, \textit{op. cit.}, 1929, p. 20.
‘Commodity Specific’ Blocks

Before settlers could stock their blocks, they had to decide what commodities to produce. A significant number of soldier settlers embarked on enterprises which were later found to be uneconomic for their particular holdings. Details of the original discussions between settlers and inspectors about the choice of enterprises are not available in the archival records. It is probable that informal discussions were held when the settler went onto his block and the only mention of the decision in the records occurred when the stock was purchased. Inspectors were expected to both oversee and assist settlers so they would have been involved in this important decision. However, they were not prepared to shoulder a portion of the blame for any mistakes that were made. A large number of blocks in the Western District were relatively ‘commodity specific’ where the settlers did not have many (or even any) choices in what was produced.

Dairying was profitable in 1920 so a number of settlers in the southern part of the region bought cows and commenced producing cream for their local butter factories. The proximity of the butter factory had an important influence on the decision. The majority of blocks were unsuitable and these settlers were forced to find other enterprises. Within a matter of months stock prices had dropped, so the cows were usually sold at a loss. This was assuming that the cows had survived. The losses on soldier settlement blocks from disease, starvation and lack of water were considerable. Because of the large number of soldier settlers who engaged in

129 PROV, VPRS 748. Box 61, L. E. Glare, Warrong Estate, Inquiry Board, 8.11.23.
dairying, this industry has been treated separately and a detailed discussion is contained in chapter nine.

A number of settlers made several shifts before they settled on the most suitable commodity to produce.\(^{130}\) While these changes would have been carried out in consultation with the local inspectors, they could have provided an impression of poor farm management to the C.S.B. No evidence has been found of any settler who shifted commodities and did not subsequently lose money in the changeover.\(^{131}\)

On Elderslie estate in the far north of the region, the settlers were unable to find any profitable commodities in the short to medium term. Blocks were too wet for cropping, the pastures were not developed enough for fat lambs, beef cattle or dairying and the estate was too far from a butter factory for the latter. The only alternative was wool growing but heavy and sustained losses from disease made this unprofitable. It would be a number of years, and legislative changes, before these settlers had reasonable expectations of success.

To add to the thirty-five Elderslie settlers’ problems, their economic viability was affected by isolation. The nearest Victorian railway siding was approximately sixty miles from the Estate and the nearest South Australian one was

\(^{130}\) PROV, VPRS 748 Box 131, G. Robbie, Struan Estate, George Robbie was a settler who made several moves between dairying and wool growing.

\(^{131}\) See chapter nine.
approximately thirty miles. The roads were also bad. By December 1921, the
Elderslie settlers realised that this lack of transportation would severely restrict
their access to markets. Questions were asked in the Legislative Council about the
possibility of a downward revaluation of the land and the establishment of a light
rail line to the settlement.\textsuperscript{132} The settlers were unsuccessful in their attempt and
had to contend with poor access to markets and high transport costs for many
years. It cost J. W. McDonald, a settler on the estate, £3-15-7 to get his fencing
wire carted from Hynam, the nearest rail siding, to his block in addition to the
freight from Melbourne to Hynam.\textsuperscript{133} While Elderslie was an extreme case, the
condition of the roads and the distance from the railway placed constraints on
settlers’ options for farming throughout the region.

\textit{Exploitation of the Land}

Unlike post World War Two soldier settlement, no attempt was made to regulate
the stocking rate until the blocks had reached a reasonable level of development.
The stated necessity was for settlers to meet their instalments to the C.S.B. This
was not always a recipe for sustainable farming. The files do not indicate who
decided the stocking rate or on what basis the decision was made. It is reasonable
to assume that it was the local inspector and supervisor, initially with input from
the local committee. The Land Tax Register was probably also consulted to gain

\textsuperscript{133} PROV, VPRS 748. Box 144. J. W. McDonald. Elderslie Estate. lessee to C.S.B., 1.2.21.
an indication of the land quality. Subsequently, settlers found themselves in difficulties due to over-stocking and often found themselves with starving stock.

Harold Hanslow, a Commissioner with the State Rivers and Water Supply Commission, gave a colourful description of the problems caused by the type of farming soldier settlers were forced to practise:

What is a farmer? According to the dictionary he is a man who ‘farms or cultivates land’, but unless he does so without robbing the land of its fertility, he is a miner. A miner cannot reproduce; therefore a good miner takes as much as possible out of the mine by putting as little as possible into it. When this is done, the mine is useless. But a farm can be made to produce continually. If a farmer exhausts his farm then he has been misnamed, for he is a miner. Every time a farmer takes a crop off his farm he has drawn a cheque on the bank of fertility, and if he does not put some fertility back into his farm, very soon his bank account is overdrawn …

Hanslow was writing in 1939. However, his description applied to many settlers in the 1920s who lacked the financial resources to replace lost fertility.

Water: a Feast or a Famine

In addition to high establishment costs, poor housing and the difficulty of finding suitable commodities to produce, water was another critical issue. There was often either too little or too much. To compound the problem settlers could have

134 Appendix Two: Classes of land.
136 Soil fertility will be discussed on chapter eight.
both situations at different times of the year. Considerable waterlogging of blocks occurred in the winter and early spring then, when the ground water dried up, there was a shortage of stock water in the summer and autumn.

Inspectors described numerous blocks as ‘poorly drained and waterlogged during the winter months’.\(^{137}\) One of the wetter estates was Warrong. W. S. Malseed’s block was partially covered with water for six months in 1923. His supervisor reported that

\[
\text{We recommend that the matter of draining this estate be taken in hand at once. If this is not done at once the settlers will have their blocks flooded again next year.}^{138}
\]

This unsatisfactory situation continued for many years. Plans to drain the Warrong Estate were still being discussed in the mid 1930s, even after a significant number of settlers on the estate had lost livestock through flooding and starvation in the preceding years.

Gordon Beavis of Heywood wrote to the C.S.B. in 1923 that

\[
\text{We have just passed through the worst season in this district for over forty years and I have had to use up all my surplus fodder and purchase a great amount to keep my stock alive. Out of the 385 acres comprising my allotment, 250 acres have been completely under water since the 1st of July and it will be some time}
\]

\(^{137}\) Wetter estates included Warrong, Elderslie and Struan.

\(^{138}\) PROV, VPRS 748. Box 96, W. S. Malseed, Warrong Estate, Supervisor’s Report, 7.11.23.
before it is clear. … Unless it is properly drained it can only be stocked through the summer and it will not carry enough to make a safe living.  

A combination of wet seasons and low-lying, poorly drained land ensured that settlers throughout the region had to contend with heavy losses and diminished production from flooding and waterlogging.

This was not the only problem associated with water. Getting a reliable water supply could pose a difficulty for soldier settlers.  

The Royal Commission noted the problems of the significant number of soldier settlers who had commenced farming without a reliable water supply, or whose blocks were waterlogged or flooded for much of the year. It recommended that where ‘the settlement implied the provision of water or drainage[,] schemes to secure these needs should be carried out with all diligence’.  

Settlers had been on their blocks for four to five years when the report of the Royal Commission was published and some settlers still had inadequate water for their livestock. The provision of water or drainage on grazing or dairying blocks was a necessity and should already have been addressed, and not merely ‘implied’ in the prospectus for the Estate.

While the C.S.B. stated in its 1920 Annual Report that ‘On or prior to the granting of each block to a settler, steps are taken to provide an adequate water supply’

139 PROV, VPRS 748, Box 9, G. Beavis, Section 20, (Heywood District) lessee to C.S.B, 11.10.23.


there is considerable evidence that this was untrue.\textsuperscript{142} In some cases, the C.S.B. seemed reluctant to provide adequate water supplies. This was an unsustainable situation, as driving the cows to water would have an adverse effect on their lactation.\textsuperscript{143} The lack of a permanent water supply was an important factor in the heavy stock losses on dairy farms.

Livestock cannot exist without water; however local committees and inspectors were prepared to sanction the purchase of livestock for settlers who had inadequate supplies. Water was essential and it is impossible to comprehend how settlers could be expected to run livestock without it.\textsuperscript{144} It was also recognised that the quality, as well as the quantity, of the water was of prime importance in keeping stock healthy.\textsuperscript{145}

When bores or dams were installed, the C.S.B. was sometimes reluctant to advance money for windmills. R. Price, a Section 20 settler from near Heywood, was advised to use a hand pump to obtain water out of a bore for dairy cows as he could not afford a windmill.\textsuperscript{146} Price was milking twenty cows at the time. Table

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\textsuperscript{142} Annual Report of the Closer Settlement Board for the year ended 30\textsuperscript{th} June, 1920, \textit{VPP}, 1920, p. 5.

\textsuperscript{143} During the period of lactation the cow provides milk. See Appendix One: Glossary. Chapter nine contains a discussion on the nutritional requirements of dairy cows and the problems encountered during the summer months.

\textsuperscript{144} These are average figures and during the summer months, lactating cows will drink between forty and fifty-two gallons of water per day. See Appendix One: Glossary for water requirements of different animals.


\textsuperscript{146} PROV, VPRS 748, Box 126, R. Price, Section 20, Inspector Hamill to C.S.B., 7.12.33.
6.5 shows that a lactating dairy cow drinks on average 18.09 gallons of water per day, therefore Price would have to pump 362 gallons of water per day just to maintain his cows. This would have necessitated a very efficient hand pump, assuming the settler had enough time in addition to his other farm duties. The windmill seems a justifiable investment.

Table 6.5. Water requirements for dairy cattle

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Gallons per animal per year. (Average)</th>
<th>Gallons per animal per day. (Average)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dry</td>
<td>4,226 (16,000 litres)</td>
<td>11.58 (43.84 litres)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milking</td>
<td>6,604 (25,000 litres)</td>
<td>18.09 (68.49 litres)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: D. Cummings and D. Perry, ‘How much water do I need?’ Landcare Notes, Department of Natural Resources and Environment, Victoria, Melbourne, June 1996.

There is also the link between water and pasture. To maintain pasture growth a certain amount of rainfall is required, too much or too little adversely affecting the production. As mentioned above, local committees were directed to only sanction the purchase of livestock if there was sufficient feed on hand.147 Two points are important regarding this directive. First, ‘sufficient feed’ is a subjective, and constantly changing, amount. When the season is ‘drying off’ at the start of summer, the quality of the feed deteriorates rapidly. What was ‘sufficient feed’ of adequate quality in November could be grossly inadequate a month later. Second, and conversely, heavy rain that waterlogged part of the property would have a significant and adverse effect on feed availability.

When existing water holes dried up, soldier settlers were forced to cart water for their livestock or drive them to the nearest permanent water supply. Settlers on dairy farms had an additional problem. The nutritional requirements of lactating dairy cows are such that a plentiful supply of high quality feed is necessary just to maintain the milk supply. In the summer months, when the nutritional quality of the fodder is at its lowest, cows could eat for a considerable period during the day and still lose condition without supplementary feed. The time spent walking to and from water would cut into the time available for grazing as well as using up energy, which in its turn would require even more food. The low digestibility of the summer feed would also mean that the cows could have difficulty physically eating enough for their nutritional requirements. Their subsequent loss of condition also affected their ability to reach oestrus at the required time.148

The additional energy required to walk the often considerable distances to water meant that cows frequently ‘dried off’ prematurely.149 H. A. Hill, a dairy farmer on Hilgay Estate, had considerable difficulties with the elements when he went onto his block. Initially Hill had no stock water on his block but he put down a well, which went dry in the first summer. He then had to drive his cows several miles to water, consequently they went dry. W. H. Leach of Warrong also had to drive his cattle to a nearby river for water. The river was deep and between 1920

148 The period in the reproductive cycle of female mammals during which they are ready to mate with a male. See Appendix One: Glossary.

149 The term ‘dried off’ refers to the fact that the cows ceased to give milk. See Appendix One: Glossary.
and 1922, two cows and fourteen calves drowned. In 1923, Leach lost ‘a number’ of cows due to the dry season. Whether this was through inadequate feed or water is not stated in the file but, whatever the cause, it was a substantial loss.

Another settler with an inadequate water supply was George Robbie of Struan Estate. In 1919 he applied for £25 to construct a dam. The C.S.B. required further information from the local inspector before they would agree to the expenditure. Inspector D. M. Younger wrote back pointing out that it was ‘Absolutely necessary for all of the lessees to have plenty of water’. He explained that two of the settlers on Struan (including Robbie) had no water at all on their blocks and recommended that four other settlers on the estate also be advanced money for dams. Robbie got his dam, but the Hon. G. L. Goudie. MLC inspected the Paschendale (Struan) settlement in 1922 and reported to Parliament that only about one in eight settlers on the estate had any year round water supply and the others had no equipment for carting water. He stated that they had been unsuccessful in getting assistance to install tanks. This was during the second year

150 PROV, VPRS 748. Box 92, W. H. Leach, Warrong Estate, Letter to C.S.B requesting advance of £100 for a bore and windmill. 25.8.22.
151 ibid., Inspector Hindaugh to C.S.B., 1.9.1923.
152 ibid., 10.12.19.
154 Hon. G.L. Goudie, MLC, VPD, 1922, vol. 160, p. 148. The Struan Estate was later referred to as Paschendale due to confusion with another ‘Struan’ near Natracoorte. SA. This is the name by which the district became, and remains, known.
of the settlers’ occupation of their blocks. In this early period, the majority of settlers on Struan estate were engaged in dairying with about twenty-five cows each.

*Rabbits*

Soldier settlers throughout the region had to cope with vermin, principally large infestations of rabbits. The Department of Primary Industries and Resources of South Australia estimates that twelve rabbits will eat as much as one sheep. As well as the sheer herbage mass that rabbits consume, their grazing pattern is different and more destructive than that of sheep or cattle. Rabbits graze pastures to ground level and then eat the roots, thus removing the plant from the ecosystem and encouraging erosion. Settlers who were successful in establishing pastures had to face the strong probability that rabbits would eradicate the improved cultivar.

Rabbits were the cause of a number of disagreements between the C.S.B. and settlers. In 1924, Layfield Allan, a settler on Hilgay, received a letter from the Board to say his block was badly infested with rabbits and that he would receive no further advances until they were dealt with. Allan replied, protesting his innocence and detailing his experiences with rabbits on the badly infested block.

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155 V. Linton, and B. Cooke, ‘Rabbits – the cost of lost pasture’, *Fact Sheet*, The Department of Primary Industries and Resources of South Australia, August 1987.

156 N. Newland, Environmental damage by wild rabbits, *Fact Sheet*, The Department of Primary Industries and Resources of South Australia, September 1966.

157 PROV, VPRS 748. Box 2, L. Allan, Hilgay Estate, C.S.B., to lessee. 30.4.24.
My allotment was the worst for rabbits when I took it over. I started digging them out as soon as I got the ring fence up. I applied for wire netting and was told that it was granted. I had a man assist me at £1 per week for six months. My netting was delayed and I had to keep going through the warrens that I had dug out.

Then he had to stop digging out rabbits for two months in order to build his home.

By this time, the rabbit numbers had built up to their original levels and his previous work had been wasted.

However I bogged into them again with the pick and shovel and I have got 200 acres clear of rabbits and I could milk 50 cows more if I had them. ... My financial position is bad on account of the rabbits but I have got a good block which will pull me through as soon as I can get at the milking. I am still digging out from light to dark seven days a week. My tally up to now is 5,000 full grown rabbits, not counting kittens.

Allan described the sixty acres he was digging at that time as ‘just one warren’ and concluded ‘that neither man nor beast can live where these cursed rabbits are’. This letter satisfied the Board and his rabbits received no further mention until 1929 when he had ‘cleared all rabbits off block’.

The physical nature of the block made a considerable difference to rabbit eradication. L. V. Donehue of Chrome Estate had a sandy creek running through his block, which provided an ideal site for rabbit warrens. Arthur Bond of Warrong Estate reported that he had ‘been greatly handicapped by having to

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158 ibid., lessee to C.S.B., 3.5.24.
159 ibid.
160 ibid., Inspector Younger, ‘pink’ form report, 22.10.29.
161 PROV, VPRS 748, Box 44, L. V. Donehue, Chrome Estate, Inspector to C.S.B., 26.5.28.
spend so much time destroying rabbits, and this will continue until I get time to cut the scrub they live in’.162 Other settlers in stony areas found it almost impossible to eradicate rabbits.

Settlers found that their efforts to control the pest were constrained by adjoining landholders. If they were unfortunate enough to have inefficient neighbours (or adjoining Crown land) all their hard work was wasted unless they could afford the expense of installing wire netting round their boundaries and then remove all the rabbits from their blocks.163 In November 1921, the Coleraine Albion reported that six soldier settlers were prosecuted for failing to control the rabbits on their blocks.164 These settlers were accused of not doing enough work to satisfy the requirements of the Vermin Destruction Act. They pleaded ‘not guilty’ and cited lack of finance, the heavy workload in the establishment of their blocks and ill health as their reasons for not complying with the Act. It was pointed out that if a block was not completely fenced with wire netting, it was hopeless to try to control the rabbits. If there was feed on the block, the rabbits would arrive from elsewhere. Therefore, they had to be kept out with wire netting or completely

162 PROV, VPRS 748. Box 13, A. Bond, op. cit., lessee to C.S.B., 28.9.21.

163 PROV, VPRS 748. Box 26, W. Capelhorn, Elderslie Estate, ‘... position seen as hopeless due to financial position and vermin coming in from elsewhere, especially Hardys’, ‘pink’ form report. 2.9.32.

164 ‘Rabbits on Gringegalgon: Settlers prosecuted’, Coleraine Albion, 16.11.1921.
eradicated from the district. Wire netting was an expensive, but necessary, option.\textsuperscript{165}

\textit{Settlers’ Prospects}

For a brief period in 1920, there was a perception that soldier settlement had started well. Considerable satisfaction was expressed by the C.S.B. when it was reported that

\begin{quote}
  satisfactory progress is being made by the settlers, and many of them had exceptionally good returns. The settlers are hopeful, and if the present indications of a good season are realised a large percentage of them will be out of financial difficulties.\textsuperscript{166}
\end{quote}

This was a rare positive appraisal of soldier settlers in the Annual Reports of the Closer Settlement Board. Another similar assessment occurred at the conclusion of the first Elderslie estate shearing when the local supervisor reported to the C.S.B.\textsuperscript{167} He stated that ‘The settlers on this estate are a very fine type of young man, keen, steady and industrious and very sanguine of their prospects’. As conditions deteriorated, praise by either supervisors or inspectors would become increasingly uncommon.

The first impressions outlined above would not give settlers cause for complacency regarding their future prospects. As noted above, the value of wool

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\textsuperscript{165} In 1922, Keith Catchlove, a settler on Elderslie Estate, wanted an extra £180 to provide wire netting around his boundary. PROV, VPRS 748. Box 78, K. Catchlove, Elderslie Estate, lessee to C.S.B., 6.6.22.

\textsuperscript{166} Report of the Closer Settlement Board for the Year ended 30th June 1920, p. 5.

\textsuperscript{167} \textit{ibid.}, Supervisor to the C.S.B., 29.11.20.
declined markedly with a flow-on effect to livestock values. Like several other Elderslie settlers J. W. McDonald, bought sheep at the Elderslie clearing sale. He purchased 404 six-toothed\textsuperscript{168} wethers for one pound and eleven pence per head.\textsuperscript{169} Two years later he sold the sheep for half what he had paid for them.\textsuperscript{170} In the unlikely event that McDonald did not have any debts, the returns from the sale of wool would barely cover the loss, leaving no profit.\textsuperscript{171} Similarly, Murdoch Vickery, from the same estate, bought 274 four-year-old wethers in 1920 and when they were due to be sold in 1921, Inspector Campbell estimated that they were also worth half their purchase price.\textsuperscript{172} These were early and expensive lessons in the uncertainties of rural commodity markets and a warning that farming could be a risky business.

By the time the ‘free’ period ended, and the settlers received their first accounts from the C.S.B., a number of factors had combined against the profitability of soldier settlement. The drop in the value of agricultural commodities meant that previously economically viable blocks were no longer liveable areas. The returns

\textsuperscript{168} The age of sheep is ascertained by the number of adult teeth. Two teeth appear at about one to one and a half years, four teeth at about one and a half to two years, six teeth at about two to three years and eight teeth (full mouth) when the sheep is fully grown at about two to four years.

\textsuperscript{169} PROV, VPRS 748. Box 144, J. W. McDonald, Elderslie Estate, Inspector to C.S.B., 27.4.20

\textsuperscript{170} ibid., lessee to C.S.B., 1.5.22.


\textsuperscript{172} PROV, VPRS 748. Box 74, M. Vickery, Elderslie Estate, Inspector Campbell to C.S.B., 30.6.21.
obtainable from these blocks became incapable of supporting the settler and his family, providing enough for running expenses and ongoing farm development. On top of these costs, settlers were also required to make regular payments to the C.S.B. From the time the first instalments were due, settlers found it difficult to meet their commitments.

In March 1920 the Prime Minister, W. M. Hughes, authorised soldier settlers to use their War Gratuity Bonds to make payments to the C.S.B. These Bonds were a one-off payment of 1s 6d for every day of service, deferred for five years as a redeemable bond. Hughes’ directive is significant as it indicates that by early 1920, when the majority of soldier settlers were taking up their blocks, the Commonwealth government recognised that a large number would be unable to make their payments to the C.S.B. In the same month, the C.S.B. told Robert Beard of Warrong that they would grant him a further advance of £300 as long as he lodged his War Gratuity Bond with them as liquidation. Numerous settlers were instructed to transfer their Bonds ‘for the purpose of paying any ordinary debt such as instalments due on land or advances’. Garton has pointed out, that this transfer of War Gratuity Bonds often took the settlers’ remaining capital.

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173 PROV, VPRS 10645. C.S.B. Correspondence, 30.3.20. ‘War Gratuity Bonds interest at 5.25% pa. will be made transferable for the purpose of paying any ordinary debt such as instalments due on land or advances of soldier settlers. ... Under the circumstances I recommend that War Gratuity Bonds be accepted from soldier settlers in payment of amounts owing in respect of the land and advances.’ W. McIver. (memo)

174 PROV, VPRS 748. Box 9, R. Beard, Warrong Estate, C.S.B. to lessee, 22.3.21.

175 PROV, VPRS 10645. C.S.B. Correspondence, 31.3.20.

176 ibid., p. 129.
The Bond was earning interest at five and a quarter per cent. Many settlers lost their right to this payment, and the potential interest, almost immediately.

One commonly cited reason for the failure of soldier settlement was that settlers had insufficient capital.\textsuperscript{177} The level of monetary assets becomes academic when looking at future success because settlers with capital either put it into improving their blocks or their homes. This expenditure did not necessarily improve their ability to meet their instalments to the C.S.B. Their wish to improve their blocks was a reasonable decision for new settlers. As several soldier settlers stated when they were interviewed for their Qualification Certificates, they wanted ‘to make a home’.\textsuperscript{178} While this could be described as an idealistic dream, it summed up the aspirations of the majority. Their first priority was developing the farms and providing for wives and families. Paying for them came second. In 1925, it was reported to the C.S.B. that J. E. Arnold of Greenhills Estate

\begin{quote}
has improved his land considerably and by doing so has not paid enough attention to his financial details and has committed himself to too heavy repayments on his improvements over the first five years on his land …\textsuperscript{179}
\end{quote}

Neither the settlers nor their inspectors would have envisaged the rural decline, which would soon worsen.

\textsuperscript{177} Royal Commission into Soldier Settlement, 1925, p. 17. Pike. \textit{op. cit.}, 1929, p. 23.

\textsuperscript{178} PROV, VPRS 748. Box 144, J. W. McDonald, \textit{op. cit.}, Evidence to Qualification Committee, 1920.

\textsuperscript{179} PROV, VPRS 748, Box 44, J. E. Arnold, Greenhills Estate, Inspector's Report, 23.10.25.
With the worsening economic conditions, and the subsequent writing-off of arrears, those with private capital often ended up in a worse position than those with no capital who were able to gain greater concessions. Fred Handley’s £800 in assets did not help him. He only received £100 advance from the C.S.B. and built his own reinforced concrete home at a cost of £600, which may have been an unwise move. In 1924, he lost 200 sheep with disease and his wool clip subsequently declined from twenty-four to ten bales. Handley reported to the C.S.B. that he had put about £1,200 worth of improvements into his block. He had paid all sums owed to the C.S.B. until the last instalment. However, with stock losses and declining commodity prices he sank into arrears and in 1926 transferred his block. Handley lost all, or most, of his capital and the balance owing on land was £3,088-18-1 and improvements £166-3-6. This was a young man, in good health and with farming experience who had been able to save money before coming on to the block. He received minimal advances and was able to meet his commitments for several years. Handley had managed to pay back approximately £144 of the amount owing on his block, which was unusual. Most settlers had not managed to pay anything off their capital account. Handley’s higher than normal asset level did not save him.

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180 PROV, VPRS 748. Box 131, F. Handley, Elderslie Estate, Qualification Certificate documentation. The assets consisted of £335 cash, seven horses (£84) plus sheep.
181 ibid., lessee to C.S.B., 1.7.23.
183 ibid., C.S.B. to lessee. 11.5.26.
The economic situation, heavy stock losses, high initial costs and mediocre land quality made it hard for settlers to stay out of arrears with their payments to the Board. In 1923, E. Moore of Warrong was described by his inspector as ‘A very sound type of settler who should be successful’. Moore was thirty-seven years old when he was interviewed for his Qualification Certificate and had been a farmer all his life. He took up his block with £150 in the savings bank, plus a team of horses and plant to the value of £100. However, by 1925 his arrears were up to £631-5-1, which was made up of land (£466-3-3), stock (£3-7-9), implements (£22-8-6) and buildings (£108-5-7). Moore had put all his money into the block and described it as ‘second to none in the district’. The money could not be spent twice. Having considerable improvements on his block was of no direct help when he, or other settlers, fell into arrears. It did however make them eligible for any concessions that became available.

J. E. Hindaugh had a considerable asset base when he applied for his Qualification Certificate in 1920. He was described as a good farmer, with

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184 PROV, VPRS 748, Box 8, E. Moore, Inspector’s report to C.S.B., 27.4.23.
185 When a settler was described as having ‘been a farmer all his life’ it is impossible to isolate those who had worked on family farms under supervision from those who had been farmers in their own right.
187 *ibid.*, lessee to C.S.B., 3.12.25.
188 PROV, VPRS 748, Box 74, J. E. Hindaugh, Assets listed included £300 cash, £128 war gratuity, twenty horses & buggy, £300 furniture.
considerable prior experience, and his returns in the early days were well above average. (Table 6.6)

Table 6.6. Returns for J. E. Hindaugh, Warrong Estate, 1921-1924

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No of cows milked</th>
<th>Sale of cream</th>
<th>Sale of Pigs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>£275-14-2</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1922</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>£531-1-6</td>
<td>£50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1923</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>£452-18-9</td>
<td>£75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1924</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>£655</td>
<td>£160</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: PROV, VPRS 748, Box 74, J. E. Hindaugh, ‘pink’ form report, 20.3.25.

Like other soldier settlers, Hindaugh spent his money on improvements to his farm and by 1925 was milking fifty cows by machine.189 This was unusual, as the Board did not approve of dairy farmers installing milking machines. However, an exception may have been made because he was also a C.S.B. inspector. Hindaugh is a good example of an efficient and conscientious settler who reinvested his surplus income in his property. Through misfortune, he fell behind in his payments to the Board.190 Two possible reasons for his deteriorating fortunes were that he initially lost £320 by running sheep, which were unprofitable at that time, and that he incurred severe losses in his dairying operation during 1925.191 Hindaugh was able to gain considerable concessions and was still there in 1938. Numerous similar cases illustrate the problems faced by settlers who saw their primary task as improving their blocks. While this was initially expected of them,

189 ibid., ‘pink’ form report, 17.10.25.
190 ibid., lessee to C.S.B., 20.3.25.
191 See chapter nine for a discussion of Hindaugh’s losses.
as the state-wide level of arrears rose to alarming levels, the C.S.B. placed greater priority on paying back the loans. Development of the blocks was expensive and did not always improve profitability in the short term. Critics of soldier settlement failed to take into account that setting up any sort of farm was (and is) an expensive business. While settlers in the Hamilton region did not have the high cost in machinery of those in the cropping areas, they still had to purchase livestock.

In 1928, *The Age* reported on the Western District Advisory Board considering that ‘Among some settlers there was a tendency not to play the game’.\(^{192}\) It was mentioned that some had built expensive homes or made other unnecessary improvements, others had bought motor cars on time payment which all placed a heavy burden on their ability to meet other (ie C.S.B.) commitments. As noted above little evidence has been found of this supposed extravagance.

The C.S.B. found it difficult to distinguish between deserving cases and those settlers deemed to be ‘misfits’. In 1925, the Royal Commissioners had recommended that ‘funding of arrears, and other financial adjustments, to relieve deserving cases from undue pressure should be expedited’. However, they considered that

\(^{192}\) *The Age*, 15.3.1928.
No encouragement of any kind should be extended to misfits, but they should be judged sympathetically and under certain circumstances their exit from the scheme should be facilitated by granting discharges of their liabilities.¹⁹³

These two recommendations would later become connected during the investigations of the Inquiry Boards but there remained doubt as to the dividing line between ‘deserving cases’ and ‘misfits’. No attempt was made to define what was meant by a ‘misfit’. When conditions were at their worst, this derogatory term could have been applied to a number of ultimately successful soldier settlers. In the light of the conditions faced by the men during their war service, and their experiences as soldier settlers, it was inevitable that some showed signs of being ‘misfits’.

*Settlers obtaining work ‘off-farm’*

In Australia, small farmers have traditionally left the block in times of financial hardship, to search for work.¹⁹⁴ Historically, numerous settlers have succeeded by adopting this stratagem. The Royal Commission acknowledged the precedent, observing that

> it may be legitimately enough contended that the settler is expected, like other pioneers on small holdings, to earn money by outside work in the slack time.²⁰⁵

¹⁹³  *ibid.*, p. 27.

¹⁹⁴  Reflections of this in literature include the short story ‘The Drover’s Wife’ and the poem ‘Andy’s Gone with Cattle’ by Henry Lawson.

¹⁹⁵  Royal Commission on Soldier Settlement, 1925, p. 12.
The Commissioners qualified this statement by noting that the blocks allotted to settlers should have been big enough for them to make a living and repay the Board for the land and any advances received. The majority of blocks were not big enough. In the eyes of the C.S.B., soldier settlement was different from previous attempts to establish small farmers on the land. In an unrealistic policy, soldier settlers were discouraged from working off-farm to generate additional income. Since many settlers had unsuitable or uneconomically small holdings and the great majority were in arrears, they needed to make every effort to maximise their returns.

In theory, settlers were expected to become fulltime farmers, not farm workers with a farm as a sideline. However, the architects of the scheme failed to take into account the contraction of the rural economy or the quality of the land. In the initial phase of settlement, the majority of settlers had too much essential work to do on their own farms to even consider outside employment. As settlers developed their blocks, outside work sometimes became feasible.

Soldier settlers hoping to generate ‘off-farm’ income faced practical problems. Assuming they could find a quiet time of the year when there were no essential tasks to carry out, employment would have to be found either in shearing, farm labouring or road building. On big estates like Warrong or Elderslie, settlers had

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196 Income received from outside the environs of the farm.
to travel a considerable distance to find work.\footnote{197} Theoretically, they would have to compete against a number of like-minded men for any available jobs. A quiet time of the year for soldier settlers might also be quiet for the established landholders in the area.

When work was available, it was often inconvenient. Murdoch Campbell walked six miles daily to the Elderslie depot shearing shed\footnote{198} where he was the wool classer.\footnote{199} He would then spend a minimum of ten hours at work before walking home again. With the shearing industry working a five-and-a-half day week, Campbell would have little time to work on his own block. However, the wages would help his cash flow.

David Crabtree’s experiences give another perspective of the situation awaiting settlers who worked off-farm:

> I have to be away working to keep my family comfortable and I don’t always feel inclined to work on Sundays which is compulsory when I am away all the week.\footnote{200}

Crabtree was honest enough to report that after shearing for five-and-a-half days a week he preferred to rest on the Sabbath. In addition, he had been discharged

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\begin{itemize}
\item \footnote{197}{‘Hamilton district land settlement’, \textit{Hamilton Spectator}, 30.9.1920. p. 6.}
\item \footnote{198}{This was a shearing shed in a central location where a number of farmers took their sheep to be shorn.}
\item \footnote{199}{Interview with his daughter, Josie Campbell. July 1995. \textit{op. cit.}}
\item \footnote{200}{PROV, VPRS 748, Box 77. D. J. Crabtree, Elderslie Estate, lessee to C.S.B., 15.12.21.}
\end{itemize}
medically unfit from the army with cerebral spinal meningitis and his back was
still weak when he was interviewed for his Qualification Certificate.\textsuperscript{201}

The issue of settlers doing work away from their farms was a vexing one and the
official policy on the issue changed over time. In the early days, when settlers did
not have the time, the C.S.B. was prepared to condone the practice.\textsuperscript{202} Later when
settlers would have had more time to work off farm, the C.S.B.'s attitude
hardened and men with jobs were asked to explain their actions.

While working off-farm gave settlers a genuine reason for being absent from their
blocks, a number of inspectors disapproved of them being away for any reason
when they called. These settlers received adverse reports and it seems to have
been immaterial whether the settler was working or having a day in town. The
C.S.B.'s policy was such that any mention of the settlers’ absence from their
block was couched in disapproving terms in the inspector’s reports. While there
were soldier settlers who were alcoholics and poor workers, a significant number
of hard working settlers received unnecessarily adverse reports for absence from
the block. Reading the files indicates that inspectors may not always have tried to
find out why the settler was absent. In 1928, R. G. Johnson of Elderslie was
absent when Inspector Blake called.\textsuperscript{203} Johnson claimed that he was on the block

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{201} \textit{ibid.}, Qualification Certificate, 1920.
\textsuperscript{202} \textit{ibid.}, lessee to C.S.B., 15.12.21.
\textsuperscript{203} PROV, VPRS 748, Box 85, R. G. Johnson, Elderslie Estate, Inspector Blake to C.S.B.,
10.1.28.
\end{flushright}
but in the paddock and out of sight. The inspector did not believe this and reported that the settler’s car was away. Blake also told the C.S.B. that he ‘noted that he [Johnson] was driving a new Chrysler car’. This was an even greater crime in the eyes of the Board, which felt that soldier settlers did not need motor cars.

An idea of the settler’s perceptions of the Board’s attitude to outside work, as well as the necessity for it, can be gained from the following letter:

McBain has at times had to take on outside work with his team, carting, ploughing etc, ... this may cause a black mark with the C.S.B. as they are sure to know of it but this would be unjust as it is the only means he has of providing for his wife and family and I know, although he wouldn’t tell me, what a tough battle they have had at times.

Later, during the Depression settlers also had to contend with local attitudes towards them taking casual work off-farm. A perception existed in the bush that soldier settlers obtained more concessions than other small farmers who, for one reason or another, had not enlisted. By 1931, David Crabtree, who had been able to go away shearing in 1921, wrote that he ‘would be laughed at by the unemployed about if I tried for a job off my block’. By this time, settlers had to suffer in silence.

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204 *ibid.*, 10.2.28.
205 *ibid.*
206 Douglas papers, Letter from Douglas to the C.S.B. on Peter McBain’s behalf, 1932.
207 PROV, VPRS 748, Box 77, D. J. Crabtree, lessee to the C.S.B., 28.3.31.
Conclusion

For all the extravagant promises, it quickly became clear that the majority of soldier settlers were embarking on a life of poverty and servitude. This chapter has shown that the initial optimism of the men was short-lived. The experiences of the first three years indicate that there would be an increasing gulf in aims and aspirations between the settlers and the C.S.B. The former wanted to develop their blocks and make homes for themselves and their families. As economic conditions deteriorated, the C.S.B. became increasingly insistent that settlers put as much money as possible into paying for their blocks. The two aims were unlikely to coincide either initially or in the future.

Soldier settlement started amid rapidly changing circumstances. The workload associated with setting up and administering the scheme meant that mistakes were always possible. For political and social reasons, the scheme had to be planned and implemented quickly. With no form of price control, it was inevitable that there would be a blow-out in costs, while in hindsight a correction in the price of export commodities was also probable. Critical comments noted earlier, such as those of *The Herald* on the ‘free period’, ignored the reality on many estates.²⁰⁸ Soldier settlers were pioneering farmers, most of whom were starting with almost totally undeveloped blocks. It showed considerable ignorance of the realities of farming, or of business in general, to expect them to make payments to the C.S.B. immediately.

²⁰⁸ *The Herald*, 1.4.1932.
The close interdependence between farmers and their physical environment was also introduced. This theme will be returned to, as a significant number of the settlers’ problems can be traced to the complex relationship between the farmer and his land. In the next chapter, the problems associated with animal pathology, one of the more significant physical causes of settlers’ inability to meet their commitments, will be explored.
Chapter Seven

Animal Mortality on Soldier Settlement Blocks

Worms of all sorts take their toll, in spite of constant drenching, which in itself causes a number of losses.

W. Douglas.¹

Introduction

The more intensive farming necessary under soldier settlement had unexpected consequences in the area of animal health. The most significant was increased animal mortality. While the C.S.B. and inspectors tended to blame settlers for stock losses, an analysis of the documented diseases shows that they were usually not to blame. These animal diseases were affected by the climate, the nature of the land, the available nutrition and the efficiency of neighbouring settlers. Animal mortality was one of the less publicised reasons for the failure of a number of soldier settlers. Even if settlers did not fail, the losses had a significant effect on their production.

Numerous ‘pink’ form reports and letters from settlers to the C.S.B. mention substantial stock losses. One of these was L. E. Glare of Warrong who wrote to the C.S.B. in 1923 noting that ‘out of 23 cows, 11 died and owing to the remaining 12 having severe drenches only 5 are in calf’.² Two significant factors affected Glare’s profitability. Firstly, there were the initial losses and secondly,

² PROV, VPRS 748, Box 60, L. E. Glare, Warrong Estate, lessee to C.S.B., 25.10.23.
the production loss due to the poisonous nature of the drench.\(^3\) Losses of this magnitude were not unusual in the region.

Several sources have been identified for the stock diseases that affected soldier settlers in South West Victoria. Purchased animals could introduce disease onto the block. Nutritional deficiencies caused, or accentuated other diseases. Finally, the damp environment exacerbated a considerable range of diseases, including worm infestations, liver fluke and black disease. Irrespective of the cause, most of the ailments led, at the very least, to production losses. In addition, the available treatments were expensive, dangerous and usually ineffective.

Background

There was a general absence of scientific veterinary advice available during the 1920s. This was not restricted to South West Victoria and there were few employment opportunities for veterinarians.\(^4\) C. B Schedvin has suggested several reasons for the lack of interest in veterinary information.\(^5\) Firstly, graziers and farmers preferred to be their own vets through decades of practical experience. This had led to a reliance on ‘folk’ remedies of varying usefulness. While farmers and graziers supposedly had practical experience, they sometimes had

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\(^3\) The drenches in use during the 1920s and 1930s had active ingredients including arsenic, kerosene, turpentine and nicotine. (One recipe for a home mixed worm drench consisted of one ounce white arsenic, 1.5 figs strong tobacco and two ounces washing soda, mixed and boiled in four gallons of water.) Pearse, *op. cit.*, 1926, p. 354.


\(^5\) *ibid.*
inappropriate remedies for common complaints. In 1933, the *Journal of the Department of Agriculture of Victoria* warned against the dangers of drenching with kerosene\(^6\) which was frequently used for cases of hoven\(^7\) (bloat) and impaction.\(^8\) The writer concluded that the beast often died from the kerosene drench. Conversely, an article in a 1917 edition of *The Melbourne Stock and Station Agent* on ‘Mortality of Dairy Cows in the Hamilton District’ spoke approvingly of drenching for cripples, paralysis and rickets with kerosene, baking soda and water.\(^9\) When experienced farmers were reduced to using dangerous ‘folk’ remedies, such as kerosene, for common complaints, inexperienced soldier settlers were not necessarily any more knowledgeable. Secondly, landowners were accustomed to heavy stock losses seeing them as a necessary price for farming in a harsh and unpredictable climate. To soldier settlers, who could not afford to lose valuable livestock, fatalistic attitudes were unacceptable.

Thirdly, the early years of soldier settlement were accompanied by an unexpected rise in the incidence of animal parasites.\(^10\) Schedvin has described how the increase caught farmers and other interested parties by surprise and indirectly led

\(^6\) *Journal of the Department of Agriculture of Victoria*, vol. XXXI, October 1933, p. 531.

\(^7\) Bloat is a common complaint in cattle and can be fatal. The rumen is the first of the four stomachs of the cow and becomes distended with gas. See Appendix One: Glossary.

\(^8\) See Appendix One: Glossary.


to the foundation of the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research.\textsuperscript{11} Before World War One it had been felt that the existing level of agricultural science knowledge was adequate, if approved methods of animal husbandry were applied by farmers.\textsuperscript{12} In 1913, Cherry noted that ‘present day knowledge and methods are capable of making safe the position of the farmer from year to year’.\textsuperscript{13} By the 1920s, the situation had changed. The use of the existing technology by farmers still needed improvement, but the unsolved scientific problems facing rural industry grew rapidly with a rise in the incidence of various animal and plant diseases. These included bovine mastitis, pleuro-pneumonia and brucellosis in the beef and dairy cattle industry, internal parasites and blowfly strike in the wool industry and rust infestations in the wheat industry.\textsuperscript{14} Farmers throughout Victoria faced significant losses from these animal and plant diseases.

\textit{Difficulties with Diagnoses}

Without veterinary involvement, the diagnoses of animal diseases in the settlers’ files may not have been accurate. F. G. Glare of Warrong lost fourteen cows in 1922 and thirteen cows in 1923.\textsuperscript{15} While the majority of settlers on Warrong who lost cows attributed the losses to starvation, Glare reported that the deaths were

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{11} It later became the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation. (CSIRO)
\item \textsuperscript{12} Schedvin, \textit{op. cit.}, 1987, p. 8.
\item \textsuperscript{13} Cherry, \textit{op. cit.}, 1913, p. v.
\item \textsuperscript{14} \textit{ibid.}
\item \textsuperscript{15} PROV, VPRS 748, Box 60, F. G. Glare, Warrong Estate, Inquiry Board, 3.8.27. (This was a brother of L. E. Glare cited above.)
\end{itemize}
caused by ptomaine poisoning from eating dead rabbits. On an initial examination, it seemed unlikely as cows are herbivores and eat grass, not meat. However, cattle suffering from phosphorus deficiency, not uncommon among dairy cows in coastal regions, are known to eat old bones and rabbit carcasses.\(^{16}\) In the 1920s, phosphorus deficiency was usually fatal.\(^{17}\) Therefore the cows probably died of either phosphorus deficiency or botulism contracted from eating the carcasses. The distinction was probably irrelevant to Glare who had the production loss and the additional cost of replacements. The diagnosis was reasonable in that instance. The more critical issue to be addressed was the phosphorus deficiency, which caused the illness in the first place.

Other settlers reported that they lost livestock through snakebite.\(^{18}\) This diagnosis was difficult to substantiate unless the snake was actually observed biting the animal. It may have been a case of the settler not knowing the cause of death. In a number of cases, the cause of the ailment can only be tentatively assessed. In 1933, George Robbie reported to the C.S.C. of ‘having been unfortunate by having a disease amongst my cows with the result that they have been producing very poorly’\(^{19}\). Robbie did not mention the causes but a ‘pink’ form report filled


\(^{18}\) PROV, VPRS 748, Box 7, A. E. Barton, Struan Estate, lessee to C.S.B., 10.3.33.

\(^{19}\) PROV, VPRS 748, Box 131, G. Robbie, Struan Estate, lessee to C.S.B., 15.9.33.
out the following month reported that ‘Lessee unable to get his cows in calf’. Robbie's cows could have had brucellosis or a venereal disease. The alternative was that he had insufficient feed and the cows were too emaciated to conceive.

**Introduced Diseases**

Soldier settlers were at risk of having disease introduced onto their blocks during their initial stock purchases. The C.S.B. bought stock on their behalf with dairy cows, in particular, freighted in from other districts. During the early 1920s there were few safeguards in place to prevent the spread of diseased livestock. In a number of diseases, symptoms do not appear for several months. George Black from Nangeela had cows bought on his behalf by the C.S.B. in Melbourne and freighted up to Casterton. These developed contagious bovine pleuro-pneumonia (usually referred to as ‘pleuro’) in 1921. A very small organism known as *Mycoplasma mycoides* causes bovine pleuro-pneumonia. Symptoms are reduced appetite, suspension of rumination, harsh coat and a decrease in milk production. The cow loses condition rapidly and breathing becomes shallow and difficult. Coughing becomes more pronounced and finally the cow becomes too weak to remain standing and dies.

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20 *ibid.*, ‘pink’ form report. 30.10.33.
21 PROV VPRS 748. Box 12, G. Black, Nangeela Estate, lessee to C.S.B., 26.11.21.
23 *ibid.*, p. 6.
24 *ibid.*
Bovine pleuro-pneumonia is a serious disease, not only on account of the rapidity of its dissemination throughout the herd, but because of the necessity of destroying all the infected animals and the quarantine restrictions that must be imposed. Cattle that recover become ‘carriers’ and act as centres for fresh outbreaks. It is probable that one or more ‘carriers’ were bought on Black's behalf. Exposure to severe hardships such as travelling or inadequate nutrition can cause clinical signs to appear in ‘carrier’ animals, which quickly infect the rest of the herd.25 ‘Carrier’ animals exhibit no external signs of the disease, which meant that it could be spread throughout the herd before the settler realised his cows, were infected. Black lost eight head at an estimated value of £148. All his cattle were then placed under quarantine and could not be sold.

Pleuro-pneumonia was not restricted to the one block as ‘nearly every Nangeela settler is quarantined with pleuro’.26 It is possible that all the Nangeela settlers' dairy cows travelled to Casterton on the same train. The large numbers of soldiers' blocks to be stocked during a short space of time assisted the dispersal of infected animals throughout the State.

The Journal of the Department of Agriculture of Victoria reported in 1918 that knowingly selling cows with either pleuro-pneumonia or contagious abortion

25 ibid.
26 ibid.
(brucellosis) was a crime.\footnote{Journal of the Department of Agriculture of Victoria, vol. XVI, May 1918, p. 308.} Black attempted to discover where the C.S.B. had purchased the cows in the hope of gaining recompense from the previous owner. As was to become a common practice when a settler was the victim of circumstances beyond his control, the C.S.B. failed to respond.\footnote{PROV VPRS 748. Box 12, G. Black, Nangeela Estate, lessee to C.S.B., 26.11.21.} This failure to reply was an early indication of how the Board continued to treat settlers.

There was no cure for cattle with ‘pleuro’ in the 1920s but control measures were in place to stop the spread of the disease. As well as quarantining livestock, the Department of Agriculture could destroy cows suffering from certain notifiable diseases, including pleuro-pneumonia, with compensation paid to the owner.\footnote{Sillcock, \textit{op. cit.}, 1972, p. 88.} J. R. Shady, a Section 20 settler from Casterton had five cows destroyed in 1933.\footnote{PROV, VPRS 748. Box 137, J. R. Shady, Section 20, ‘pink’ form report, 18.1.34.} The compensation of £27 was paid direct to the C.S.C. rather than the settler. By 1935 the Department of Agriculture had destroyed twenty-one of his cows.\footnote{\textit{ibid.}, ‘pink’ form report, 10.7.35.} Destroying affected animals was a valuable means of eradicating the disease in dairy herds. This was little consolation for soldier settlers when they did not receive the compensation.
Environmental Aspects of South Western Victoria and Diseases

One of the recurring themes of this analysis is that environmental factors had a considerable influence on the success or failure of local soldier settlers. In W. D. Andrew’s 1938 summary of pastoral development in Victoria, he concluded that the more intensive grazing required under soldier settlement led to

the development of certain pathological trouble such as footrot, enterotoxaemia, liver fluke, and various worm infestations of the lungs, bronchial tubes and alimentary tract.\(^{32}\)

Settlers and inspectors may not have fully understood the correlation between environmental factors and disease but it was frequently noted in the Advances files that the country was ‘not sound’, and ‘likely to contribute to the incidence of disease’. V. A. Gladman’s block was described as ‘not sound, lung worm causing losses’.\(^{33}\)

The correlation between the grazing of sheep on wet, low-lying ground and the subsequent high incidence of worm infestations was documented as early as 1912. In that year it was reported that, as a method of minimising worm infestations

sheep should not be grazed on low-lying, damp or marshy land, and for this reason and also because it predisposes to footrot, it is an axiom of the sheep breeder that such land is not good sheep country.\(^{34}\)

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\(^{33}\) PROV, VPRS 748, Box 60, V. A. Gladman, Warrong Estate, Land Board, 16.7.25.

\(^{34}\) S. S. Cameron, (D. V. Sc., M. R. C. V. S.) ‘Worms in sheep’, Journal of the Department of Agriculture of Victoria, March 1912, p. 154. He recommended salt and turpentine as a lick. (1 pint turpentine plus 28 – 56 lbs Liverpool salt.)
It was suggested that farmers should fence off the wetter parts of their runs and not use them in the spring and early summer.\textsuperscript{35} Soldier settlers with small, poorly drained, waterlogged blocks found this impossible. Numerous settlers did not have access to higher and drier paddocks. Settlers on a number of estates in the region including Warrong, Elderslie, Squattleseamere and Knebsworth\textsuperscript{36} were allocated ‘low lying, damp or marshy land’\textsuperscript{37} and had to contend with the subsequent, and related, increase in the incidence of stomach worms, footrot, liver fluke and black disease. Soldier settlers could, unknowingly, assist the development of disease in livestock through their managerial practices.

\textit{Liver Fluke}

One of the deadliest of the internal parasites prevalent in the region, and associated with waterlogged land, was liver fluke. This is a parasite found in the bile ducts of the liver of sheep and cattle. It lays eggs, which pass down the bile ducts to the bowel and are expelled with the faeces. The eggs develop and hatch into larvae in water and after about two months, the young fluke emerges and attaches itself to a blade of grass. Sheep grazing on swampy areas swallow it. The fluke penetrates the wall of the small bowel and attaches itself to the liver where it remains for about ten weeks, growing and causing considerable damage.


\textsuperscript{36} Elderslie originally contained 35 settlers, Warrong 62 settlers, Knebsworth 17 and Squattleseamere 20.

\textsuperscript{37} Cameron, \textit{op. cit.}, 10.3.1912.
Finally, it enters the bile ducts and grows to maturity in about twelve weeks from the time of hatching. The cycle then repeats itself. Grazing sheep intensively on wet country greatly increases the risk of liver fluke.  

David Crabtree of Elderslie Estate reported to the C.S.B in 1927 that

> As the Board must know it’s quite a common thing to lose the majority of one’s sheep in the years that the fluke is bad which has been the case in several years since we’ve been settled here and it is likely to be until we get the country broken up and sown with clover.

In 1930, he ‘made a flock of sheep freehold ... which after making freehold all died of fluke’. The inspector conceded that losses caused by liver fluke were beyond Crabtree’s control. In 1932, Wally Douglas estimated that the losses through fluke on Elderslie had amounted to ‘between 30,000 and 40,000 sheep since we have been in occupation’.

**Black Disease**

Sheep which survived liver fluke were susceptible to black disease (*infectious necrotic hepatitis*) for which there was no reliable cure in the 1920s. Black disease was first recorded in Australia in 1894 and by 1930, it was the most

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39 PROV, VPRS 748. Box 77, D. Crabtree, Elderslie Estate, lessee to C.S.B., 27.3.27.
40 ibid., lessee to C.S.B., 18.8.30.
41 ibid., Inspector Blake, ‘pink’ form report, 30.11.29.
serious infectious disease affecting sheep in Australia, costing the sheep industry an estimated one million pounds sterling each year.\textsuperscript{43} Fatalistically, Douglas described the dual problems:

\begin{quote}
Tetrachloride is a sure cure [for liver fluke] but not a preventative. The parasite attacks the liver, the drench kills it, the black disease attacks the injured liver and is very deadly.\textsuperscript{44}
\end{quote}

Black disease is caused by a bacterium (\textit{Clostridium novyi}), which lives in the soil.\textsuperscript{45} The bacteria are swallowed with grass and eventually reach the liver where they remain for long periods in a harmless resting stage. If the liver has been damaged by fluke to such an extent that the oxygen tension of the tissue is lowered sufficiently, the latent spores of \textit{B. oedematiens} can germinate, multiply, and produce the powerful toxin that results in black disease, a fatal toxaemia which kills the sheep.\textsuperscript{46}

In 1924, Arthur William Turner, a Walter and Eliza Hall Fellow at the University of Melbourne's Veterinary School, commenced research into black disease of sheep.\textsuperscript{47} Initially he had difficulty obtaining access to field cases of black disease
due to apathy, or even hostility, towards his work by stock breeders. They feared that any association of their flocks with such a disease would reduce the value of their land.\footnote{ibid.} If graziers were loath to admit to the presence of disease, then they were unlikely to have informed the C.S.B. of the susceptibility of their properties prior to selling for soldier settlement. However, graziers may not have realised the influence of the physiography of the land on their stock losses.

Turner demonstrated that a two-fold attack on the problem was possible. First, the farmer could attack the intermediate host of the sheep liver fluke (which is the snail, \textit{Lymnaea tomentosa}) by clearing swamps and watercourses. Secondly, these areas could be treated with 'bluestone' (copper sulphate) at the rate of 25 to 30 lbs per acre.\footnote{ibid.} These methods were expensive and difficult for soldier settlers on waterlogged or flooded blocks.

An alternative was a drench of carbon tetrachloride in paraffin oil. However, carbon tetrachloride in larger than recommended doses caused liver damage which initiated black disease in sheep carrying \textit{B. oedematiens} spores. Farmers had to be meticulous in administering the drench as an overdose could precipitate an outbreak of the disease. In 1933, the \textit{Journal of the Department of Agriculture of Victoria} outlined an approved method of drenching sheep.\footnote{\textit{Journal of the Department of Agriculture of Victoria}, vol. XXXI, January 1933, p. 7.} It was seen as a
two-man operation in which one man held the sheep and passed a nozzle with
funnel attached over the tongue between the back teeth. The person drenching
poured the dose in slowly. This accepted method of drenching sheep made it
difficult to guarantee accurate doses. In addition farmers had to mix the drench
themselves. The accuracy of their measuring utensils also affected the
formulation.

It was recognised that drenching was a dangerous practice. In a farmers' manual
of the 1920s it was suggested that sheep be yarded the previous day, a few
drenched immediately and then left for twenty-four hours.\textsuperscript{51} If these sheep
survived then the rest could drenched at that dose rate. One problem with that
procedure is that the sheep's tolerance to the drench is, at least partially,
dependent on its weight. Therefore, lighter sheep in the mob could still succumb
to the treatment.

Settlers and inspectors did not always recognise black disease. Dave Pahl
experienced heavy sheep mortality in 1930. Inspector Murphy reported that these
losses were due to a disease known as the ‘rot’ as the liver was rotten before
death. In his opinion, it was a malnutrition disease that had nothing to do with
fluke. He prescribed troughs of a compound mixture consisting of Salt (50 parts),

\textsuperscript{51} Pearse, \textit{op. cit.}, 1926, p. 354.
Superphosphate (30 parts) and Ashes (20 parts) and reported to the C.S.B. that Pahl did not want to comply.52

There was no veterinary reason for using the mixture. The symptoms suggest black disease caused the deaths and salt, super and ashes were useless against a diseased liver. Inspector Murphy did not believe in black disease and, in another instance, reported ‘… severe losses of sheep mysteriously, from so called black disease - related to fluke’.53 Similarly, in 1931 Clive Grummett lost 100 sheep from black disease which he originally described as an ‘obscure disease’.54

Even when treatments became available, they were not always affordable. In 1931 Pahl lost a further 255 young sheep through an acute outbreak of liver fluke followed by black disease. Inspector Murphy then recommended the treatments outlined by Turner. To spread copper sulphate on the block at a cost of 12/6 per acre or £546-5-0 for the entire property was an expensive undertaking.55 In 1931, Pahl’s gross return from wool was only £188-8-0 and he had little additional income.56 The new vaccine for black disease was more feasible but still expensive at £10 for 600 doses.57 Like other settlers on Elderslie, Pahl was unable to

52 PROV, VPRS 748. Box 122, D. M. Pahl, Elderslie Estate, Inspector Murphy to C.S.B., 26.11.30.
53 ibid., ‘pink’ form report, 4.3.32.
54 PROV, VPRS 748. Box 66, C. Grummett, Elderslie Estate, lessee to the C.S.B., 9.3.31.
57 PROV, VPRS 748. Box 66, C. Grummett, Elderslie Estate, lessee to C.S.B., 20.10.32.
increase his stock numbers owing to low lambing percentages and stock losses.

When pasture renovation could be carried out in conjunction with drainage, it lowered the incidence of liver fluke and black disease. By 1936, vaccination for Black Disease was being carried out successfully with very few losses.\(^{58}\)

**Worm Infestations**

Infestations of various intestinal and stomach worms were common in the wetter areas of South West Victoria. They caused heavy losses, both in livestock mortality and in lost production from infected animals which managed to survive. Like liver fluke, worms reproduce with one part of the life-cycle occurring outside the sheep and intensive grazing aggravates the problem. Each worm develops from a larva picked up during grazing. Given the right conditions, worms spread rapidly through the flock and the condition of the sheep deteriorates rapidly. To give an idea of the dissemination of the disease through the flock

\[\text{[A] sheep heavily infested with } Haemonchus Contortus \text{ (Barbers Pole worm or large stomach worm) may harbour 3,000 females [worms], each laying 5,000 - 10,000 eggs per day, giving a daily output of 15 - 30 million eggs.}\]^{59}\]

These eggs are passed out onto the pasture in the faeces where they develop into larvae, climb onto the herbage and are swallowed to recommence the cycle.

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While the description of the worm’s life-cycle applies to sheep, cattle are also susceptible to worm infestations, and the life-cycle is similar.

Treatments for the more common internal parasites were dangerous (and often ineffective) and could also lead to stock losses. Clive Grummett lost 160 sheep from late 1928 to April 1929 leaving him with no surplus sheep for sale and a subsequent drop in revenue. His comments to the C.S.B. are informative regarding farming methods during that era:

I have been drenching them all the summer and am still at it, as soon as I cure them of one complaint, they get another, so I am getting plenty of experience and I am not having any fun. The good season seems to have let loose every worm and parasite there is ... 60

Grummett would have been right about the conditions as the good season meant damp pastures in the spring, which provided ideal breeding conditions for worms. It was doubtful if Grummett was curing his sheep of any parasites as the worm treatments available in the 1920s were of doubtful value and continued drenching led to drench resistance.61 The toxic ingredients probably contributed to the losses.

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60 PROV, VPRS 748. Box 66, C. Grummett, Elderslie Estate, lessee to the C.S.B., 16.4.29.

61 This occurs when parasites build up a resistance to the drench. If the drench destroys ninety per cent of the parasite and ten per cent survive, the survivors and their offspring will probably be resistant to the drench. The only way to handle this problem is to use a completely different formulation as the next drench.
To control worms in sheep it is necessary to break the cycle, which can only be done by putting freshly drenched sheep into ‘clean’ paddocks.\textsuperscript{62} Any larvae present in the ‘clean’ paddocks will have died during the time the paddock is empty. The majority of soldier settlers did not have access to ‘clean’ paddocks and, even if they did, the importance of the contamination phase in the life-cycle of parasitic diseases was not recognised until 1948.\textsuperscript{63}

It was understood that the larvae could be picked up in drinking water and Pearce recommended that ‘On land that is at all infested with worms, the sheep should not be allowed to water at mud holes. They should be given proper troughs’.\textsuperscript{64} The majority of settlers had no choice in the matter; they had wet blocks and watered their stock at ‘mud holes’. While Pearce concluded that sheep should be given proper troughs, these necessitated a windmill and tank, which were considerably more expensive than having a dam dug. The C.S.B. always preferred the more economical option, so dams were usually provided. As early as 1925 it had been recognised that ‘Good food is the best preventative of worm infestation in sheep. Therefore the use of fertiliser is recommended’.\textsuperscript{65} Even where

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{62} These are paddocks that have been spelled for several weeks, preferably in the summer months.
\item \textsuperscript{63} Cole, \textit{op. cit.}, 1986, p. 86.
\item \textsuperscript{64} Pearse, \textit{op. cit.}, 1926, p. 353.
\item \textsuperscript{65} ‘Fertility of pastures and disease prevention’, (No author cited) \textit{Journal of Australian Veterinary Association}, December 1925, pp. 82-3.
\end{itemize}
superphosphate was used, the land was usually too infertile to produce adequate ‘good food’.

A related problem was the sheep blowfly, *Lucilia cuprina*, which flourished with the increase in internal parasites. Worm infestations led to scouring and the resulting soiled wool provided an ideal breeding ground for the *Lucilia cuprina* maggots.⁶⁶ Flies lay eggs on the soiled wool and the resulting maggots caused heavy losses during the hotter months. Sheep that died during the summer months could not be burnt and their carcases would also become breeding sites. Flystrike was a relatively new problem and the first occurrences were documented at the end of the nineteenth century.⁶⁷ H. W. Ham a sheep expert with the Department of Agriculture described its origins in 1911. He concluded that the flies

> got a start through the widespread poisoning of rabbits and high livestock losses during a drought. In addition, the ringbarking of trees, bush fires and other causes had helped to cut the numbers of natural blowfly predators such as birds and lizards.⁶⁸

Flystrike has continued to cause significant losses in the region until the present day.

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⁶⁶ In one CSIRO experiment in the late 1970s, flystrike was about twenty times worse in a flock without worm control than in a similar flock with thorough worm control. ‘Blowfly strike’, Victorian Department of Agriculture *Agnote*, Melbourne, January 1979.


⁶⁸ *ibid.*
Footrot

Footrot is a virulent disease in the wetter parts of the state, which continues to cause considerable production losses. However, the Advances files for the Hamilton district contain very few references to the disease. One possible reason for the omission is that footrot was so widespread it was accepted as a ‘given’ part of farming. If everyone had it and there was no cure, it was not worth even mentioning as an excuse for a poor woolclip or for sheep and lambs that failed to thrive.

Diseases Associated with Inadequate Nutrition

In 1925, J. E. Hindaugh was forced to buy fodder which led to the loss of twenty dairy cows through impaction. The feeding of material containing a high proportion of starches or sugars causes impaction of the rumen. In Hindaugh’s case feeding grain, or its by-products, bran or pollard, probably caused the problem. When the cattle are unaccustomed to this fodder the acids, created by the breaking down of the material, damage the lining of the rumen and allow the toxins to enter the bloodstream. Not only was adequate nutrition necessary for dairy cows but settlers had to take considerable care when providing supplementary fodder.

69 A highly contagious disease of sheep that can cause lameness and reduced production in infected animals. In the first stages of the illness, animals can become lame very quickly and will lose weight and production (such as decreased milk from lactating ewes, reduced fertility, reduced wool growth and quality). See Appendix One: Glossary.

70 PROV, VPRS 748. Box 74, J. E. Hindaugh, Warrong Estate, lessee to C.S.B., 20.3.25.

71 ibid., Inquiry Board, 1928.

In the 1920s, various articles in local papers recognised the correlation between the spreading of superphosphate and animal health.\textsuperscript{73} Writing in the \textit{Warrnambool Standard} in 1920, Mr S. H. Ruddock, a veterinary surgeon, stated that omission to top-dress the soil may lead to the development of such diseases as impaction, paralysis of the tongue, dry murrain, cripples and several others feared by the stock owner.\textsuperscript{74}

Cripples\textsuperscript{75}, paralysis and rickets were common, and deadly, diseases of dairy cows in the Hamilton district during the soldier settlement era. One farmer was reported as finding that top-dressing with super not only improved the carrying capacity of his farm but completely eradicated cripples. The diseases noted by Ruddock were all exacerbated by deficiency in the soil and top-dressing helped pasture growth, with a subsequent reduction in animal mortality.

\textit{Mastitis}

Bovine Mastitis and contagious abortion were the most common diseases on dairy farms.\textsuperscript{76} Mastitis is an inflammation of the udder, which reduces milk production as well as causing permanent damage.\textsuperscript{77} In the 1920s, little was known about the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{73} Murphy, \textit{op. cit.}, 17.1.1917. p. 10.
\item \textsuperscript{74} \textit{Warrnambool Standard}, 19.1.1920. p. 3.
\item \textsuperscript{75} Cripples is caused by phosphorus deficiency and the symptoms include retarded growth, poor condition, low milk yield, reduced fertility, lameness and short gait. Bones become brittle and break easily [\textit{Osteomalacia}]. Mortality may occur in dry periods. See Appendix One: Glossary.
\item \textsuperscript{76} Belschner, \textit{op. cit.}, 1984, pp. 61 - 67.
\item \textsuperscript{77} \textit{ibid.}, p. 258. Mastitis is still one of the most serious diseases on dairy farms. It is sometimes called mammitis. See Appendix One: Glossary.
\end{itemize}
disease and there was no cure. G. Fethers writing on mastitis in the *Australian Veterinary Journal* in 1927 reflected that ‘one is at once completely handicapped by one’s lack of knowledge of the disease’.\(^7\) An outbreak of mastitis was a disaster for dairy farmers as ‘It is a common thing to find over fifty per cent of the cows in a herd to be affected’.\(^7\) In 1933, the *Journal of the Department of Agriculture of Victoria* suggested ‘a drench consisting of one pound of Epsom salts and a cup full of treacle in a quart of warm water is advisable’.\(^8\) The drench acted as a purgative, but did not help control the disease. The best thing that settlers could do to prevent the spread of mastitis was to adopt a high degree of hygiene in, and around, the dairy.\(^8\) This was extremely difficult in the basic, earthen-floored dairies used by soldier settlers. The disease was often fatal but, in less severe cases, affected cows could be sold for slaughter. Cows were susceptible to milk fever at calving time when they suffered a drop in the level of calcium in the blood. Farmers could treat milk fever and save the cow by inflating the udder with a bicycle pump to cut off the milk supply. However, this invariably led to mastitis.\(^8\)


\(^{79}\) ibid.

\(^{80}\) ‘Mastitis’, *Journal of the Department of Agriculture of Victoria*, vol. XXXI, October 1933, p. 529.

\(^{81}\) Belschner, *op. cit.*, 1984, p. 264.

\(^{82}\) Fletcher, *op. cit.*, 1987, p. 130.
During the early 1930s, the size of Alveron Barton’s dairy herd was decreasing as a number of his cows had mastitis.\textsuperscript{83} In February 1931, he had twenty-six cows, in March 1932 twenty-two, and in March 1933 only twenty.\textsuperscript{84} He was then asked by the C.S.C. to increase his dairy herd to thirty-five cows in the hope of addressing his growing arrears. In a short sighted move, Barton’s inspector had forced him to sell his heifers to pay creditors.\textsuperscript{85} The future of the dairy herd was dependent on the retention of the best of the heifers and the culling of the lowest performing cows each year. Keeping the heifers was even more essential given the declining herd numbers.

\textit{Brucellosis}

‘Pink’ form reports often recorded that a significant percentage of dairy cows had not ‘come into profit’, that is calved. Several possible reasons have been identified for this failure to produce a calf. The bull could be infertile, the cow could be too emaciated to conceive, or could conceive and then abort. The latter is the most likely reason as \textit{brucellosis} \textsuperscript{86} ‘is widespread throughout the country causing losses far greater than is realised’.\textsuperscript{87} While a number of dairy farmers reported cows aborting their foetuses it is unlikely that they identified all cases.

\textsuperscript{83} PROV, VPRS 748. Box 7, A. E. Barton, Struan Estate, ‘pink’ form reports for 1931, 1932 and 1933.

\textsuperscript{84} \textit{ibid}.

\textsuperscript{85} PROV, VPRS 748. Box 7, A. E. Barton, lessee to C.S.C. 10.3.33.

\textsuperscript{86} Also referred to as Bang's Disease or Contagious Abortion.

\textsuperscript{87} G. Fethers, B.V.Sc. ‘The control of abortion disease in bovines’, \textit{Australian Veterinary Journal}, March 1927, p. 17.
The prevalence of foxes in the area made it probable that settlers did not find foetuses and therefore failed to diagnose the problem.

Brucellosis is spread through a vaginal discharge, which occurs for about two weeks after aborting. Cows contract the disease orally, from pasture or contaminated water. The germ then passes from the intestine into the bloodstream and then to the pregnant womb or udder. Cows usually abort after the fifth month of pregnancy. The disease is unpredictable; there may be a large number of abortions and then a decline. However carrier cows could be present and reinfect healthy cows introduced into the herd.

Brucellosis could be treated but infected cows had to be completely isolated to prevent the disease spreading. Quarantining was difficult for soldier settlers on small blocks, especially if they did not realise the cows had aborted. William Frizzel diagnosed brucellosis in 1929. He had thirty-nine cows out of which fifteen aborted and, of these, only six ‘came into profit’. At that time his cows were returning an average of £9 per head per annum. The loss of nine cows

90 *ibid.*, p. 63.
91 *ibid.*
92 PROV VPRS 748, Box 11, W. G. Frizzel, Wootong Vale Estate, lessee to C.S.B., 25.2.30 and C.S.B. to lessee, 6.3.30.
from the herd made a substantial difference to the profitability of the enterprise, ignoring the potential value of the dead calves.

Frizzel’s experiences with brucellosis followed a typical course with the disease steadily worsening for several years and then declining. His production figures from 1928 to 1932 (Table 7.1) show the decline in his dairy herd and the effect on his profitability over the period.

Table 7.1. Number of cows milked by William Frizzel, Wootong Vale and the gross income received.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No. of Cows</th>
<th>Gross Income</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1928</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>£396</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1929</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>£351</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>£306</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>£288</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1932</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>£324</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: PROV, VPRS 748, Box 11, W. G. Frizzel, Summary report, 26.9.32.

The C.S.B. disregarded Frizzel's problems with brucellosis:

Lessee should be advised that the Board is not satisfied with his methods. He must realise that the actual number of cows has been reduced instead of increased.\(^{93}\)

It was bad enough to lose a significant number of animals through no fault of his own but then to be told ‘that the Board is not satisfied with his methods’ was frustrating. The C.S.B. ignored reports of stock mortality through disease. In the
words of another settler, ‘The Board will take no notice of us stating the losses we have had and the diseases we have had to fight’.94

In 1932, H. L. Campbell wrote to the C.S.B. seeking further concessions, considering that diseased cows were already on the block when he had taken it over.95 He suspected that his inspector knew the cows had contagious abortion but failed to tell him. During the first six years, he lost all these cows and another thirteen head. While dairying was not his only form of income, the effects on his level of arrears were significant:

Table 7.2. Level of arrears for H. L Campbell, Bochara

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Arrears</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16.4.30</td>
<td>£434-4-0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.12.30</td>
<td>£511-9-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.7.31</td>
<td>£600(plus)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-6-32</td>
<td>£723-3-8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: PROV, VPRS 748, Box 25, H. L. Campbell, lessee to C.S.B, 16.6.32.

Once brucellosis became prevalent in a herd it was hard to eradicate. Brucellosis can also be transferred to humans in the form of undulant fever.96 The symptoms are that the patient feels unwell, sweats, has pain in the joints and feels continually tired. As the diagnosis is difficult, it is possible that a number of

94 PROV, VPRS 748, Box 77, D. Crabtree, lessee to C.S.B., 10.10.30.
95 PROV, VPRS 748. Box 25, H. L. Campbell, Bochara Estate, lessee to C.S.B., 16.6.32.
soldier settlers and their wives who were described as continually unwell were suffering from undulant fever.

*Note on the Number of Elderslie Cases Cited*

A considerable amount of the evidence relating to sheep parasites has been from settlers on Elderslie estate. Animal health problems were common throughout the region, but the incidence on Elderslie was so high, and the reputation of the estate so bad, that in 1927 it was reported that

> when we offer a pen of sheep for sale and the buyers get wind of where they come from, it’s the end of getting anything like market price for them.⁹⁷

Elderslie’s bad reputation continued and, in 1931, Casterton auctioneers advised clients against purchasing sheep from the Estate, which further depressed the settlers’ prospects.⁹⁸ Seventeen of the original thirty-five farmers on Elderslie had failed by 1931 and several additional leases had been cancelled, even though the lessees were still in residence.⁹⁹ The problems on Elderslie were repeated, with differing degrees of severity, throughout the region.

*Conclusion*

Stock losses had a major effect on the profitability of soldier settlers. The influence of animal health on soldier settlement is an area in which only limited

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⁹⁷ PROV, VPRS 748, Box 77, D. Crabtree, Elderslie Estate, lessee to C.S.B., 27.3.27.

⁹⁸ PROV, VPRS 748, Box 97, P. J. Martinich, Elderslie Estate, Inspector Murphy to C.S.B., 1.10.31.

⁹⁹ Overview of Elderslie, provided by Wally Douglas (undated, about 1930-1932) for W. S. Manifold, MLC.
historical research is possible and in the absence of detailed records, the lost production can only be estimated. The whole question of animal health was a difficult one. Settlers who overstocked in order to meet their commitments to the Board had losses from starvation. Veterinary assistance was difficult to obtain, assuming the knowledge was available, and the C.S.B. blamed the individual settlers for stock losses. A percentage of settlers may have been incompetent but the number of stock that died points to more than just poor farming practices. The loss of production from animal mortality and ‘ill-thrift’ helped to place many at risk of eviction.

Veterinary knowledge and the range of effective remedies increased during the 1920s and 1930s but drenches and vaccines were expensive. The high level of animal mortality is a previously underestimated factor\textsuperscript{100} which must be included in any assessment of soldier settlement after World War One. By the early 1920s, it was becoming apparent that there was a connection between soil fertility and animal health. To address this link topdressing with superphosphate and lime were advocated in conjunction with pasture improvement. In the next chapter the related issues of topdressing and pasture development will be addressed.

\textsuperscript{100} Fletcher is an exception and notes the problems Gippsland soldier settlers had with disease. Fletcher, \textit{op. cit.}, 1987, p. 130. Lake, \textit{op. cit.}, 1987, pp. 80–81 does mention dairy hygiene, with reference to the difficulty settlers had complying with The Dairy Supervision Act.
Chapter Eight

Soil Fertility, Superphosphate and Pasture Development

The land is in short, open and available in its present state, for all the purposes of civilised men. We traversed it in two directions with heavy carts, meeting no other obstruction than the softness of the rich soil; and returning over flowery plains and green hills, fanned by the breezes of early spring. I named this region Australia Felix, the better to distinguish it from the parched deserts of the interior country, where we had wandered so unprofitably, and so long.

Sir Thomas Mitchell.¹

Introduction

This chapter will examine soil fertility, one of the most important facets of the farming process. It will set the scene by introducing the previous farming history of the region and indicate the soil fertility which existed when the settlers took up their blocks. The production of crops and grass is curtailed on infertile soil, consequently farmers are hampered in their ability to produce commodities for sale. While much of the land allocated was of poor quality², its treatment by the previous landowners ensured that the fertility was marginal.

When Major Mitchell traversed the district in 1836, he noted that ‘flocks might be turned out upon its hills or the plough at once set to work in the plains’.³ Mitchell described the land at the junction of the Glenelg and Wannon rivers as ‘one of the

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¹ Quoted in Kiddle, op. cit., 1961, p. 3.
² An examination of the Land Classifications for the eighteen main estates in South West Victoria shows that fourteen were either partially or totally third or fourth-class land. See Appendix Two: Classes of Land on Soldier Settlement Estates in South West Victoria.
finest regions on earth’.\(^4\) Eighty years later, C. J. Nichols had a small Section 20\(^5\) soldier settlement block at the river junction. He was not impressed with the location.\(^6\) Nichols wrote to the C.S.B. in 1923 in the hope of transferring his block.

I had to sacrifice my dairy herd as I could do nothing with [sic] I put crops in and now they are under water as well. It is also against the health of both my wife and self as everything in the house gets damp and if not looked after carefully gets mouldy.\(^7\)

Either the authors' perceptions, or the quality of the land had changed between 1836 and 1923.

Like many of his contemporaries, Mitchell did not understand the effect of introduced animals on the native grasslands of south eastern Australia. This land had never contained cloven-footed animals and in a very few years the quality of the ‘flowery plains and green hills’, described by Mitchell, had declined.\(^8\) The introduction of rabbits also had a significant detrimental effect.\(^9\) By 1920, when the soldier settlers took up their blocks, eighty years of largely exploitative agriculture had led to a considerable deterioration in ‘Australia Felix’.

\(^4\) Clark, \textit{op. cit.}, 1995, p. 213.
\(^5\) See Appendix One: Glossary.
\(^6\) PROV, VPRS 748, Box 8, C. J. Nichols, Section 20, lessee to C.S.B., 24.9.23.
\(^7\) \textit{ibid}.
\(^8\) Quoted in Kiddle, \textit{op. cit.}, 1961, p. 3. C. Massy, \textit{op. cit.}, 1990, pp. 426 - 427.
Exploitation of the Land

From the first white settlement in the region, there was anecdotal evidence of a gradual decline in the fertility of the Western District grasslands.\textsuperscript{10} J. G. Robertson of Wando Vale station noted in 1853 that ‘The day the soil is turned up, that day the pasture is gone for ever’.\textsuperscript{11} Crops were grown in the Hamilton district in the 1850s and 1860s with diminishing returns due to soil degradation. The research student, J. M. Watson described colonial farming as ‘a recognised kind of extortion, based on starvation methods, temporary occupation and a blatant opportunism’.\textsuperscript{12} Massy has noted that over-grazing led to soil erosion in parts of the region.\textsuperscript{13}

Professor Samuel Wadham, one of the most respected agricultural scientists in Victoria during the first half of the twentieth century,\textsuperscript{14} endorsed this analysis in 1931. He observed that animals, particularly sheep, seek out the most palatable plants in the grazing area and by intensively grazing these plants, prevent them


\textsuperscript{12} Watson, \textit{op. cit.}, 1957, p. 54.

\textsuperscript{13} Massy, \textit{op. cit.}, 1990, p. 427.

\textsuperscript{14} Wadham was Professor of Agriculture at the University of Melbourne from 1926 to 1957.
from reproducing.\textsuperscript{15} Native vegetation adapted to light and intermittent marsupial grazing did not survive heavier stocking, continual trampling and defoliation.\textsuperscript{16}

Similarly Powell, has noted that

> where soil, water and vegetation were concerned ... the profound deterioration of a number of properties over a brief period of grazing occupation was far more tangible and challenging to the early participants: it was registered annually, in their account books and even daily in their consciences.\textsuperscript{17}

The deterioration in the quality and quantity of the pastures intensified over time to the detriment of soldier settlers who took up blocks in the region.

Initially pastoralists attempted to improve their pastures by sowing northern European cultivars. These were incompatible with the Mediterranean climatic conditions in southern Australia and required frequent re-seeding.\textsuperscript{18} J. G. Robertson recognised this as early as 1853 when he wrote that ‘... after all the experiments I worked with English grasses, I have never found any of them that will replace our native sward’.\textsuperscript{19}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{15} S. Wadham, ‘Some economic aspects of grazing and pasture management in Victoria’, \textit{Economic Record}, vol. 7, 1931, pp. 184-186.
\item \textsuperscript{16} Massy, \textit{op. cit.}, 1990, pp. 426 – 428.
\item \textsuperscript{18} T. Dingle, ‘Pastoralists, farmers and the changing landscape of the Western District’. In \textit{Settlement in the Western District}, J. Sherwood, J. Critchett & K. O’Toole (eds), Proceedings of Conference held at the W.I.A.E. in 1984, p. 104.
\item \textsuperscript{19} Bride, \textit{op. cit.}, 1969, p. 169.
\end{itemize}
Prior to 1920, there had been little or no attempt to replace nutrients removed from the soil. Farmers did not fully understand the relationship between production and nutrient loss. Yield figures are not available from the grasslands to quantify the nutrient removal, however from the 1840s, objective recording of wheat yields had been carried out in the cereal growing areas. Figure 8.1 records wheat yields during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Figure 8.1. Wheat yields in Victoria, 1840 – 1949


These districts also suffered from a decline in soil fertility, which led to a decrease in crop yields. There are parallels between the decline in the cropping and grassland regions of the state.\(^\text{20}\) While a percentage of the decline was caused by the spread of wheat production into marginal areas, as Donald points out, ‘the

\(^{20}\) For example, the Wimmera compared with the Western District.
depletion of soil fertility, especially soil phosphorus and nitrogen was the paramount factor.21

Introduction of Superphosphate

Superphosphate22 was first used in the cereal growing districts during the early years of the twentieth century.23 Improvements in wheat varieties and cropping techniques also occurred.24 As can be seen from Figure 8.1, these measures helped to arrest the decline in wheat yields. However, yields remained considerably lower than during the 1840s and 1850s.

After the benefits of superphosphate were recognised in the cereal growing districts, its use slowly spread into the pastoral areas.25 The first mention of fertiliser in the Department of Agriculture Journal was in 1912. It was reported that ‘Trial applications of superphosphate and lime would be desirable for many farmers in this State owning second class land’.26 Potash (potassium), later

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22 In many of the files at the Public Records Office of Victoria, the term ‘manure’ is used for superphosphate. ‘Superphosphate’ the more accurate term, and the one in use today, will be used throughout this thesis.

23 The first experiments were conducted at Roseworthy Agricultural College (South Australia) in 1882. Donald, op. cit., 1964, p. 189. There was also limited use of potassium and nitrogen fertilisers. Frost, op. cit., 1982, Ch. 4.

24 Much of this improvement was due to work carried out by Farrer and others into varieties especially suited to Australian conditions. Wheat breeding, Frost, op. cit., 1982, pp. 121 – 124. Cropping techniques, ibid., pp. 130 - 131.

25 Articles in local papers advocated superphosphate during the 1920s but, with the decline in rural commodity prices and the great depression, the widespread regular use of superphosphate did not occur until the post World War Two ‘boom’.

recognised as an important element in pasture production, was not recommended unless the soils were of a light sandy, nature.27

The primary emphasis in this period was on greater feed production although there was a growing understanding of the influence of superphosphate on animal health. In 1916 Edward Murphy, a dairy inspector from Hamilton, was advocating ‘the improving of the pasture by top-dressings of lime and phosphates’ as a means of decreasing the level of animal mortality on local dairy farms.28 The causes of this mortality were thought to include cripples,29 rickets, paralysis and forage poisoning. By 1920, the Hamilton Spectator was advising their readers, that ‘To get more abundant growth in the coming winter, … everyone should topdress their land at once’.30

Where stock could be lightly grazed on large pastoral properties, the decline in fertility was not critical.31 It became more important when these estates were subdivided in the first decades of the twentieth century for closer settlement. By 1921 when the soldier settlers were establishing themselves in the region, it was noted by departmental soil scientists that

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27 In later years, clover has been found to respond to applications of potash throughout much of the region. Greener Pastures in South West Victoria. op. cit., 1997. p. 44.


29 An often fatal disease associated with phosphate deficiency. See Appendix One: Glossary.

30 ‘Manure for pastures’, Hamilton Spectator. 22.5.1920.

On the richest soils in the Western District ... many years may elapse before the decline in mineral elements becomes apparent and affects production. On the average and poorer country the decline in fertility has already become apparent. This is notably the case in the Hamilton district, one of the oldest settled portions of the state.32

Soldier settlers were forced to stock heavily in order to meet their financial commitments, at the same time attempting to reverse the degradation of decades of neglect. They did not have the financial resources to carry out the high level of pasture and soil renovation required.

Wadham addressed the mineral losses from livestock, calculating the depletion on a per-animal basis.33 One slaughtered bullock, the annual milk output from one dairy cow, the carcasses of approximately twenty sheep and the annual wool cut from a flock of 4,000 sheep all remove the equivalent of about 100 pounds of twenty-two per cent superphosphate from the soil.34 To put this in perspective, A. E. V. Richardson, Agricultural Superintendent with the Department of Agriculture noted that

For the past 60 years the average sheep population of Victoria has been approximately 11,000,000 and that of the cattle population 1,400,000. An approximate average of stock slaughtered would be 3,000,000 sheep and 280,000 cattle annually.35

He suggested that

32 Richardson, *op. cit.*, 1921, p. 349.
33 Wadham, *op. cit.*, 1931, pp. 185-186.
34 *ibid.*
throughout that period something like 360,000 tons of phosphoric acid, which is equivalent to 1,800,000 tons of superphosphate has been annually taken from the soil and most of this material has been removed from the grasslands.36

By 1924, only a very small proportion of the grasslands had received any superphosphate and the cost of restoring pastures to their original condition would have been enormous:

it would appear that to restore the phosphate content of the soil to what it was in 1860, nearly 2,000,000 tons of superphosphate must be added to Victorian pasture lands.37

Nutrients were also removed through leaching, particularly in the areas of heavy rainfall to the south of the region.38

These findings, together with numerous general articles advocating the fertilising of district pastures, show that by the early 1920s there was growing appreciation at a research level of the need for superphosphate in the Western District.39 In 1920, the Department of Agriculture of Victoria was conducting superphosphate trials in the Hamilton district with marked results. The results, detailed in Figure 8.2, show the increase in production made possible with superphosphate.

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36 ibid.
37 ibid.
38 Leaching occurs when water percolates or moves through the soil and removes soluble materials, particularly nutrients. See Appendix One: Glossary.
39 Richardson, op. cit., 24.4.1924. p. 197.
Figure 8.2. Yield of air-dried hay in natural pastures (cwt), top-dressed with varying artificial fertilisers, Hamilton, 1920

![Graph showing the yield of air-dried hay in natural pastures, with varying artificial fertilisers applied. The graph shows that the yield increases with the application of fertilisers, with a notable increase when lime is added.]


Soldier settlers were placed on land which would require a considerable investment in superphosphate to make farming an economic proposition. As noted above, the milk output of one dairy cow removed as much superphosphate from the soil as 4,000 sheep. Settlers, encouraged to take up dairy farming, would need large and regular applications of superphosphate which they could not afford. C.S.B. inspectors in South West Victoria encouraged topdressing of superphosphate in conjunction with the establishment of improved pastures. The decline in returns from agricultural commodities, coupled with the high cost of superphosphate and freight to the more isolated districts, made topdressing difficult to justify.

Raising production levels was no help to indebted soldier settlers when low commodity prices meant that the additional return did not equal the additional
expenditure. In 1929, superphosphate was £5-10-0 per ton ex-Melbourne but the freight to Elderslie (the furthest estate from Melbourne in South West Victoria) was another £2-10-0 per ton. Superphosphate is a heavy mineral, consequently freight was a significant component of the price. Understandably, settlers saw topdressing as an unnecessary expense.

Superphosphate applications had some residual effect on the soil but the fall-off in fertility was dramatic as shown in Table 8.1

Table 8.1. Percentage of dried grass following one application of super in 1920

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1920</th>
<th>1921</th>
<th>1922</th>
<th>1923</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No Manure</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Super 2 cwt.</td>
<td>380</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Super 2 cwt. + Lime 10 cwt.</td>
<td>445</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


These findings would have important ramifications for soldier settlers whose usual practice was to sow and topdress a paddock, and then, in the following year, do the same with a different paddock. The ideal, although unrealistic, situation would have been for the settlers to topdress their whole block every year.

The increased yield from the added application of lime suggests that there was another problem with the soil. Lime has the effect of lowering the acidity or Ph.

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41 The article does not detail the method employed in this experiment. It is probable that the grass was cut and then dried and weighed in each test plot. The ‘No Manure’ plot was a control. The most important point is the dramatic decline in the percentage of dried grass in subsequent years.
42 This is the practice throughout South West Victoria today.
and is regularly used for this purpose in South West Victoria today. Therefore, the soil was probably acidic. Edward Murphy’s suggestion in 1917 that applications of lime on dairy farms in the Hamilton district would be beneficial was correct on, at least, some properties.43

The Royal Commission on the Dairy Industry concluded that appropriate use of superphosphate was justified.44 It stressed the necessity for preliminary soil analysis, as inappropriate application could lead to no appreciable result. The first mention of soil testing on a soldier settlement block in the Hamilton area45 did not occur until the mid-1930s so it is possible that a minority of settlers, including F. G. Glare of Warrong, failed to gain any benefit from the expenditure. In 1930, he noted that ‘after several top dressings of super there is no material benefit accrued’ and that his carrying capacity was ‘far below that of the other blocks in the area’. Glare’s best lambing percentage up until 1930 was thirty-two per cent.46 This is very low by modern standards, although not unusual for the 1920s.47 The principal causes were probably a combination of inadequate nutrition, internal parasites and foxes. The C.S.B.’s response to Glare’s inability to reduce his arrears was to recommend running more cows. If Glare did not have the feed to

43 Murphy, op. cit., 17.1.17. p. 10.
45 PROV, VPRS 5,714, Box 674, Revaluation File, C. M. H. Kilburn, Warrong Estate, 2.10.35.
46 PROV, VPRS 748, Box 60, F. G. Glare, Warrong Estate, lessee to Bond, MLA, 2.5.30.
47 Lambing percentages of 100 per cent in merino ewes and 120 per cent in crossbreeds are normal in South West Victoria today.
run sheep successfully, then more dairy cows would only exacerbate the feed shortage.\textsuperscript{48} Two years later, his land was described as ‘lifeless’ and very deficient in lime.\textsuperscript{49} Settlers like Glare were in the minority. The more likely outcome was that any application of superphosphate would have a positive effect, as the nutrient level of the soil was usually low. Soil tests would have been beneficial if other elements, such as potash or molybdenum, were deficient in the soil.

C. M. H. Kilburn of Warrong was one settler who had his soil tested by the Department of Agriculture during the 1930s. The report concluded that ‘Soil [was] very deficient in plant food and necessary to give repeated annual dressings of superphosphate before satisfactory pasture growth can be expected’.\textsuperscript{50}

Therefore, for Kilburn to succeed, he needed to spend a considerable sum of money, which he did not have, on superphosphate. The majority of soldier settlers faced this dilemma. If they did not improve their pastures, they had no hope of meeting their commitments. If they did improve their pastures, they increased their debt and did not necessarily increase their profit margin.

In 1929, William Frizzel of Wootong Vale was advised to topdress as much of his block as possible.\textsuperscript{51} In the same ‘pink’ form report, Inspector Younger stated that

\begin{footnotes}
\item[48] PROV, VPRS 748, Box 60, F. G. Glare, Warrong Estate, C.S.B. to lessee, 30.3.31.
\item[49] \textit{ibid.}, ‘pink’ form report, 26.8.33.
\item[50] PROV, VPRS 5,714, Box 674, C. M. H. Kilburn, Warrong Estate, Revaluation File, Report on soil test carried out by the Department of Agriculture. 2.10.35.
\end{footnotes}
it was doubtful if Frizzel would succeed, as he was £1,292-10-4 in arrears. The
low price of butterfat in the late 1920s meant that the increased production was
unlikely to pay for the superphosphate. If Frizzel had failed, the cost of the
superphosphate would be added to his Advances Account52 but the theoretical
improvement in the value of the block from the topdressing would not be realised
if it were sold. As conditions deteriorated, the C.S.B. became increasingly
reluctant to advance settlers’ money for living expenses. The Board was,
however, always ready to advance money for superphosphate.53 There seemed to
be no point in encouraging settlers to further increase their arrears at a time when
the returns from agriculture were barely above the costs of production.

*Pasture Development*

The C.S.B. were adamant that inadequate pastures had to be rectified. The
increasing trend towards scientific methods of farming led to settlers being
advised to increase their carrying capacity by introducing subterranean clover in
conjunction with superphosphate. It was gradually becoming understood that
‘sub’ clover was a profitable cultivar54 although the hidden benefits of the
legume55 in nitrogen fixation were not fully recognised.56

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52 This was the money advanced to the lessee by the C.S.B.
53 Examples include PROV, VPRS 748, Box 146, A. Anson, Elderslie Estate, ‘pink’ form report, 18.4.28. PROV, VPRS 748, Box 43, J. F. Dix, Greenhills Estate, C.S.B. to lessee, 17-7-34. PROV, VPRS 748, Box 124, F. L. Perrottet, Gringegalgonal Estate, Inquiry Board, 10.12.27.
54 A species of plant.
55 In this study refers to clover. For further details see Appendix One: Glossary.
One of the first mentions of subterranean clover was in the *Journal of the Department of Agriculture of Victoria* in 1910. The *Journal* described Subterranean Clover, [*Trifolium subterranean*] as ‘an introduction from Mediterranean regions. Of some use as a pasture plant, it also aids in suppressing annual weeds’. Subterranean clover was much more important than first thought. It has become an essential ingredient in South West Victorian pastures, and its establishment has been a key factor in the significant increases in stocking rates since the 1940s.

Successful pasture establishment was expensive and physically difficult. In addition to the financial considerations, the waterlogged nature of much of the region increased the likelihood of failure. When carried out successfully the combination of superphosphate and subterranean clover had the potential to lift the stocking rate on some estates from less than one sheep per acre to three or four. The methods adopted and the lack of drainage on numerous blocks made this success difficult.

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56 One per cent subterranean clover in a pasture will release 12.5 pounds of nitrogen per acre into the surrounding soil. This further aids the productivity of the soil.

57 ‘Answers to correspondents’, *Journal of the Department of Agriculture of Victoria*, 10.2.1910, p. 125. An annual plant germinates at the start of the growing season, produces seed by the end of the growing season and dies at the end of the season. See Appendix one: Glossary.

58 Elderslie was Class 4 country. (see Appendix Two: Classes of Land) Discussions with local farmers indicate that by the end of the 1950s, the majority were running 3 – 4 DSEs per acre. (See Appendix One: Glossary for discussion of DSEs.)
In 1931, Wadham examined the costs associated with pasture establishment and produced the following figures:

Table 8.2. Costs of pasture establishment per acre, 1931

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>£</th>
<th>s</th>
<th>d</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preparation of seed bed</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drilling, seed, superphosphate</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost of seed (6 lbs. Wimmera Rye Grass, 2 lbs subterranean clover)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superphosphate</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rental value of land during the period of preparation</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Wadham concluded that the ‘operations require judgement and skill, and failures must sometimes occur’. Settlers were advised on the accepted methods of pasture establishment. Initially, the techniques used were costly, and not conducive to success. Subterranean clover seed was both expensive and scarce; therefore, the seeding rate was considerably lower than recommended today.\(^59\) Clover was planted with wheat or oats as a cover crop after considerable ‘working up’ of the soil. Later research has indicated problems with this widely used method. The cereals\(^60\) grew at a far greater rate than the clover, which ensured that photosynthesis, essential for the growth of the legume, was curtailed.

Consequently, the survival rate of clover plants was poor. To compound the

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\(^60\) Crops including wheat, oats and barley.
problem, subterranean clover grows along the ground. Therefore, it would be even less likely to thrive in competition with cereals, which grow upwards. The ‘working up’ of the soil would stimulate the growth of weeds, providing further competition. Finally, the cereals and legumes were competing for the same scarce nutrients in the soil. The cereal grows at a faster rate, so the clover’s ability to utilise the superphosphate, would be minimised.

However, if the establishment of improved pasture was successful, it meant that the stocking rate could be increased and dairying and fat lamb production become feasible on country that had previously only been suitable for the growing of merino wool. Andrew has pointed out that it was also the means of preventing much of the ‘ill thrift’ in the livestock:

> Because of the nutritious nature of the improved pasture and the subsequent healthy nature of the stock depastured thereon, deficiency diseases are uncommon and general disease resistance is substantially increased.

This benefit was not always apparent to settlers who would not always diagnose the cause of animal deaths or illness as poor nutrition.

**Waterlogging and Flooded Blocks**

Pasture establishment was especially difficult on wetter estates due to waterlogging. After ten years, settlers on Elderslie were still receiving adverse

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reports for not breaking up the soil and sowing down pastures. When an Inquiry Board interviewed Murdoch Campbell in 1930, he asserted ‘that the whole of his holding was too wet to be broken up and was completely covered during winter’. The Chairman of the Board rejected this statement, considering that the ‘Lessee did not impress me as being over energetic’. In 2002, this block has still not been developed and is extremely wet in winter.

David Crabtree was another Elderslie settler with a wet block. In 1931, Inspector Murphy reported that ‘There is a vast amount of waterlogging on about 400 acres of this block. The sheep have done badly and extremely severe mortality of lambs has occurred’. Murphy realised that, under the circumstances, pasture improvement was impracticable. He felt that it was imperative that drainage was carried out on the block, ‘...until this is done, topdressing on these acres is simply silly’. These reports were made ten years after the settlers took up their blocks and they had persevered with waterlogged pastures, failed crops and heavy stock losses in the intervening period. In addition, the waterlogging would help leach the superphosphate out of the topsoil, thus lowering its effectiveness.

Repeated failed attempts at growing crops and pastures could be heartbreaking.

Peter McBain was allotted 836 acres on Elderslie, on what his neighbours

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64 PROV, VPRS 748, Box 26, M. Campbell, Elderslie Estate, Report of Inquiry Board, 4.5.30.

65 This is a personal comment but as the block adjoins my own property, I am familiar with it and would describe it as low lying, crabhole infested land.

66 PROV, VPRS 748, Box 77, D. J. Crabtree, Elderslie Estate, ‘pink’ form report from Inspector Murphy, 1.9.31.
considered the worst block on the Estate. In 1932, Inspectors McDougall and Campbell asked McBain if he was prepared to renovate his pastures and crop more of his block:

He replied he was anxious to but couldn’t get the seed and super from the C.S.B. They agreed to arrange for that. McBain said that he would try and put in 85 acres. (More than they required of him.) [sic] He ploughed until he bogged plough and team twice in a few yards and got in 60 acres ... and never harvested a straw of it. Reasons: poor ground, wet season and mainly C.S.B.’s delay in forwarding super.

Sowing was expensive; using Wadham’s figures, (Table 8.2) planting the sixty acres would have cost McBain approximately £114. He had cultivated and sown crops every year since coming onto the block in 1920 but had only one (in his own estimation) good year in twelve. In that year, McBain sowed eighty-five acres, cut twenty-five tons of oaten hay and stripped ninety bags of wheat.

Wally Douglas gave a considered assessment of cropping on Elderslie, one that would apply to many blocks in the region:

As far as cropping this country is concerned it is really a waste of time, and to grow clover it must be fed on super. There is nothing in the soil for it. … Sub

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67 Interview with Mrs Elsie McBain conducted in Naracoorte, SA, June 1995. (Peter McBain’s widow.) This block was further hampered by having no road frontage.

68 Douglas papers, Letter from Wally Douglas to W. S. Manifold, MLC re Peter McBain, circa 1932. ‘It will not carry 600 sheep properly although McBain has had that number on it. 500 sheep would want a favourable season to come through in good order unless it was improved by way of superphosphate.’

69 ibid., ‘McBain paid for the seed and super for this crop but the Board seized the proceeds from the wheat, less a cash account of £22 for a horse and sundries from the agent.’
clover and continual topdressing would certainly increase production but would show a heavy loss at present prices.\textsuperscript{70}

The costs of the continuing failures made repeated attempts at sowing impracticable. Assuming McBain had sowed sixty acres a year for twelve years, his costs would have been approximately £1,368, most of which was wasted. McBain tried to carry out the instructions of the C.S.B. to the best of his ability but failed. He had to give up his block, while other settlers, including Murdoch Campbell, who refused to obey their inspectors managed to survive.

McBain, Campbell and Crabtree were not isolated cases. Numerous blocks throughout the region continued to flood, or become waterlogged, during the winter months. The small blocks and more intensive farming exacerbated the situation. In the pastoralists’ era, the graziers on the larger properties would usually have been able to move their stock to higher ground during the winter months.

Settlers on smaller properties, such as Malcolm Sim of Squattleseamere near Macarthur, did not have this luxury as often much, or even all, of their land was low-lying. He was described by his inspector in 1929, as a ‘first class farmer and a hard worker’.\textsuperscript{71} Sim was advised to crop his land, but this was a failure due to ‘the flooded nature of the land’. In 1930, he was advised by his inspector to undertake dairy farming, supposedly to lift his meagre returns. Changing

\textsuperscript{70} \textit{ibid.}

\textsuperscript{71} PROV, VPRS 748, Box 141, M. Sim, Squattleseamere Estate, ‘pink’ form report, 25.10.29.
enterprises would cost money but the C.S.B. was not prepared to help him with the establishment costs.\textsuperscript{72} As can be seen from 8.3, his income would allow him to meet any additional costs without assistance from the C.S.B.

Table 8.3. Annual income for Malcolm Sim, Squattleseamere Estate, 1930

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>£</th>
<th>s</th>
<th>d</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wool</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cream</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potatoes</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>69</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Sim also had 250 bags of poor quality, unsaleable barley and approximately £42 worth of potatoes to sell. He had planted peas but these were a failure.

It was irresponsible of inspectors to even suggest dairying or cropping on the wettest estates. Both enterprises were capital intensive but with dairying, while there was a strong chance of stock losses through disease or starvation, the financial loss was unlikely to be total. Cropping, as Peter McBain found out, could be a total failure. Sim took his inspector's advice and borrowed money privately, in order to purchase additional dairy cows. In 1931, Inspector Hamill reported to the C.S.B. that

Lessee is only milking seven cows and has hard work keeping them alive as a considerable portion of his block is under water and has been for some time.\textsuperscript{73}

\textsuperscript{72} ibid., ‘pink’ form report, 2.9.30.

\textsuperscript{73} ibid., Inspector Hamill to C.S.B., 17.8.31.
Hamill considered that Sim was losing heart and

Lessee considers that if this year doesn’t show a big improvement his case will be hopeless and looks for nothing else but for him, to use his own words, be kicked off the place. He is a good trier and a fine type of young settler.

Sim’s good character reference was probably gained because he endeavoured to obey his inspector’s advice.

The inspector did not learn from his observations of Sim’s attempts to keep his few cows alive in the previous winter. In 1932, he was still advising the lessee to increase his dairying enterprise but conceded that ‘to get established, liabilities would have to increase’.\(^\text{74}\) Later in the year Inspector Hamill reported to the C.S.B. that Sim’s crops were a total loss with ‘Wild ducks and swans swimming about through the barley’.\(^\text{75}\) Since Sim was barely able to keep seven cows alive on a block of only 242 acres, and the area under crop was flooded, it was unrealistic to expect him to put additional resources into dairying.

John Andrews of Knebsworth, was also dairy farming and attempting to crop a small wet block.\(^\text{76}\) In 1929, the C.S.B. wrote to Inspector Hamill because they were receiving no money from Andrews’ cream assignment.\(^\text{77}\) Hamill reported that the paddocks were flooded and the grass was very short. Andrews was making little from his cows and in March 1931 it was noted in a ‘pink’ form report.

\(^\text{74}\) ibid., ‘pink’ form report, 11.1.32.

\(^\text{75}\) ibid., Inspector Hamill to C.S.B., 28.4.32.

\(^\text{76}\) PROV, VPRS 748, Box 3, J. Andrews, Knebsworth Estate, ‘pink’ form report, 6.3.31.

\(^\text{77}\) ibid., Letter from C.S.B. to Inspector Hamill re cream assignment, 29.7.29.
report that sixty acres of land had been under water for six months and ‘would not
dry away until the end of the year’.\textsuperscript{78} He had managed to grow one good crop in
seven years. Andrews was lucky as in 1935 he was able to surrender the wettest
part of his holding and obtain better-drained land from parts of two other
holdings.\textsuperscript{79}

In 1931, forty acres of David Annett’s land had been under water for the past two
years due to the poor state of drainage of the Condah swamp.\textsuperscript{80} He had heavy
losses of sheep on the flooded lands and his improved pastures were completely
flooded out. Annett’s inspector reported in 1935 that the ‘Land is more suitable
for dairying but family too young at present’.\textsuperscript{81} The problems associated with the
Condah swamp were not new as, during the 1890s Depression, unemployed men
had been put to work draining the swamp.\textsuperscript{82} Here were two settlers on the same
Estate, both with waterlogged and partially unusable blocks and for them to
continue to plant crops or milk cows was unrealistic. There is no mention in the
files of the inspector suggesting that they should give up cropping or dairying on
either of the blocks.

\textsuperscript{78} ibid., ‘pink’ form report, 6.3.31.
\textsuperscript{79} ibid., ‘pink’ form report, 16.3.35.
\textsuperscript{80} Annett only had 173 acres of land. PROV, VPRS 748, Box 3, D. Annett. Knebworth
\textsuperscript{81} ibid., ‘pink’ form report, 4.6.35.
\textsuperscript{82} ‘The floods at Condah: Hardships of the unemployed from Melbourne’, Hamilton
Spectator, 12.7.1892.
Robert Beard from Warrong was another settler who had to contend with a wet block. In 1927, he attended an Inquiry Board because he wanted the culvert on the main road enlarged to prevent the flooding of his block. It was recommended that the Country Roads Board (CRB) should be consulted as to the necessity of laying a culvert to allow the water to escape. The CRB agreed to install the culvert and carried out the work. It had two openings, each six-foot wide by three foot six inches high. These culverts would move a massive amount of water, graphically indicating the problems faced by this settler before the end of 1927. The possibility of a systematic draining of Warrong Estate was mentioned in the Advances files as early as 1923 but seven years later nothing had been done.

**Conclusion**

Nineteenth century farming in the Western District was ‘extensive’ in that output was increased by farming more acres or moving to new land once the fertility had declined. In contrast to this, soldier settlers were expected to farm their land ‘intensively’ on limited acreages and were unable to move on when the land was exhausted. An inhospitable environment awaited them when they took over their blocks. The inadequate acreages restricted the settlers’ abilities to farm their land.

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83 PROV, VPRS 748, Box 9, R. E. Beard, Warrong Estate, Inquiry Board, 8.7.27.
84 *ibid.*, C.S.B. to lessee, 19.12.27.
85 PROV, VPRS 748, Box 96, W. S. Malseed, Warrong Estate, Supervisor’s Report, 7.11.23. ‘If this is not done at once the settlers will have their blocks flooded again next year.’
86 Dingle, *op. cit.*, 1984, pp. 75 - 76.
on economic and scientific lines. Soldier settlers were allocated blocks which
had been grazed extensively for many years leading to a decline in soil fertility.
The application of superphosphate was expensive and, even if they could afford
it, often useless because of waterlogging and drainage problems.

Soldier settlers were expected to take the advice offered to them but they were
also constrained by their financial situation. The C.S.B. advocated topdressing but
low commodity prices, coupled with previous failures, made soldier settlers
reluctant to further increase their indebtedness. While the pastures were poor, the
methods employed, and the waterlogged nature of much of the region, made the
establishment of improved pastures difficult. Trying to farm successfully on the
existing degraded pastures was a frustrating exercise. The next chapter discusses
the problems encountered by soldier settlers who tried to maximise their
profitability by dairy farming on underdeveloped blocks.

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87 See Appendix Three for average acreages of soldier settlement blocks in the region.
Chapter Nine

Maximising Profits Without Considering the Consequences. Soldier Settlers as Dairy Farmers

One of the biggest mistakes these settlers made when they went onto their blocks was to go in for dairying as the light ground in its present state is not suitable for that purpose.

Report of Inquiry Board. 1923.

Introduction

Dairy farming has been chosen as a case study because it provides a good example of the problems encountered by soldier settlers who ignored environmental constraints. Initially, they had been advised to opt for perceived short-term profit without fully investigating the feasibility of the enterprise. In fairness to the settlers, dairying had undergone considerable expansion during the early years of the twentieth century with advances in technology on both the farm and at the factory, increased exports, some into newly discovered markets including Japan, and most importantly, satisfactory prices. There was an expectation that this expansion would continue. In 1923 a pamphlet entitled *Australia – Farms for British Settlers* stated that ‘There is no quicker or surer

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1 Ground of poor fertility, often sandy, and of low carrying capacity
2 PROV, VPRS 748, Box 61, L. E. Glare, Warrong Estate, Inquiry Board, 8.11.23.
means of obtaining a profitable return than by dairying’. Soldier settlers would quickly discover that this statement was incorrect.

Soldier settlers taking up blocks on estates including Warrong, Hilgay, Nangeela and Struan were advised by their inspectors to become dairy farmers. This decision made sense from the C.S.B.’s perspective and was usually carried out for financial reasons. Firstly, settlers could start receiving an income earlier than from other enterprises. Secondly, the gross margins for dairy farming were better than for other forms of farming in the early 1920s. However, insufficient attention was paid to the physical constraints affecting the enterprise. The land on several of these estates was unsuitable. Table 9.1 gives an indication of the classes of land:

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4 Royal Commission on Migrant Land Settlement, op. cit., 1933, p. 5. The report indicates that, while the Commonwealth government published the pamphlet, the Victorian government was familiar with ‘and never disavowed responsibility’ for its contents.

5 Greenhills was also purchased for dairying but as much of it was stony the degree of improvement was limited. Lomas op. cit., 1979, p. 582.

6 These are four of the main dairy farming estates in the Hamilton region. These estates initially contained 110 settlers. However, it is possible that that there were some settlers who did not commence dairying. According to Lomas 58 per cent of the soldier settlement land in the Western District was in dairying areas and another 26.7 per cent was in mixed farming areas with a strong dairying base. ibid., p. 559.
Table 9.1. Main dairying estates with the class of land

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Estate</th>
<th>Class of land</th>
<th>Estimated Stocking Rate. (Sheep per acre.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hilgay</td>
<td>1/2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nangeela</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1 to 1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Struan</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warrong</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Less than 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


A listing as a Class 1 block did not necessarily indicate that Struan was suitable for dairy farming, merely that it could be expected to carry more livestock per acre than Warrong. For both Struan and Warrong to be identified as suitable for dairying indicates that land quality was not accorded a high priority in the decision making process. It is significant that all these estates were within an economic distance from a butter factory.7

In South West Victoria, the average annual rainfall varies between twenty-five inches in the north east to approximately thirty-six inches in the south west of the region.8 This is usually more effective and reliable than in other regions of the State with similar annual totals.9 The rainfall has a predominantly winter distribution because of cold fronts which sweep in from the southern oceans. Therefore, farmers have to contend with cold wet winters, with little pasture...

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7 Blocks had to be close enough to a butter factory for cream to be transported before it went sour.


growth and a short prolific growing season in the spring. This is followed by a long hot summer in which the pasture lies dormant and livestock have to eat dry feed of low nutrition and digestibility. In some enterprises, notably dairying, it has usually been necessary to provide supplementary feed during the late summer and winter for both pregnant and lactating cows.

By 1960, it had been recognised that dairying required some of the best quality land in the State. Specifically the requirements included effective rainfall for between ten and eleven months of the year and above-average soils to allow the pastures to remain productive for most of the year. Very few soldier settlement blocks in South West Victoria had the required spread of effective rainfall. The soils in the region tended to be ‘sandy or silty loam with a clayey subsoil’ and, as noted in the previous chapter, were deficient in soil nutrients. After repeated topdressing and sowing with subterranean clover and improved grasses, they

10 This rainfall distribution was one of several factors which meant that much of the farming knowledge applicable in Britain was irrelevant to the first settlers in the Western District who tried to run their pastoral operations on British lines.

11 The digestibility of the feed is the proportion that is utilised by the animal. The remainder is lost as faeces. See Appendix One: Glossary.


13 ibid., p. 52.

14 ibid., p. 55.

15 Initially ryegrass and phalaris.
were capable of producing high quality pastures. This did not occur until the 1940s and 1950s.

This chapter will examine several reasons why dairying was unsuccessful in the short term. First, the undeveloped nature of the blocks meant that settlers would have difficulty providing the high nutritional requirements of lactating dairy cows.¹⁶ (There is also the possibility that some blocks may have been marginal for dairy farming even if they were developed.) Second, cases have been identified where settlers were sold unsuitable and, occasionally, diseased livestock.¹⁷ Third, in the area of animal pathology, soldier settlers were given inadequate advice because the relationship between the incidence of animal disease and the environment was poorly understood. Finally, the majority of settlers had insufficient land to run enough cows to be economically viable.

Dairying was an enterprise in which cream and pigs provided related income streams. Pigs were a necessary (and initially profitable) adjunct to dairy farming.¹⁸ The milk was separated on the farm; the cream was despatched to the butter factory and the skim milk fed to the pigs. Therefore, settlers had the additional expense of purchasing pigs and constructing a pigsty. If the dairying

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¹⁶ Murphy, *op. cit.*, 17.1.1917. p. 10.

¹⁷ Chapter seven contains a discussion of an outbreak of pleuro-pneumonia on Nangeela Estate.

¹⁸ See Appendix Seven for fat pig prices between 1919-20 and 1943-44.
enterprise failed, the pigs became unviable. Both the dairy and pigsty still had to
be paid for, even though they were superfluous.

A significant number of soldier settlers who initially took up dairy farming only
stayed in the industry for a short period before shifting to alternative enterprises.\textsuperscript{19}

L. E. Glare of Warrong was unsuccessful at dairying due to the condition of his
small, wet and undeveloped block.\textsuperscript{20} Initially, he only had 244 acres, almost 20
per cent of which was prone to flooding during the winter and spring.\textsuperscript{21} Therefore,
it is doubtful if his block would have been of more than marginal profitability,
irrespective of the commodity produced.

In 1923, Glare wrote to the C.S.B. that

\begin{quote}
Owing to the mortality of my cows during the dry spell in the former part of the
year, I have decided to go into sheep. Captain Harrison\textsuperscript{22} thinks my block is not
fit for cows. Out of 23 cows, 11 died and owing to the remaining 12 having
severe drenches, only 5 are in calf; the remaining 7 dry cows I still have on
hand.\textsuperscript{23}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{19} Usually wool growing.

\textsuperscript{20} In 1925, Glare put in a drain that would reclaim forty-five acres of flooded land. It was
40 chains long, 4 foot 6 inches wide and 1 foot 6 inches deep and was capable of moving
a large quantity of water. PROV, VPRS 748, Box 61, L. E. Glare, Warrong Estate, lessee
to C.S.B., 25.5.25.

\textsuperscript{21} \textit{ibid}.

\textsuperscript{22} District Inspector.

\textsuperscript{23} \textit{ibid.}, lessee to C.S.B., 23.10.23.
This description introduces the problems faced by soldier settlers who attempted dairy farming. In the summer months, Glare's cows died through either starvation or insufficient water. In the winter months, the waterlogging or flooding of the block facilitated the spread of internal parasites leading to the necessity for ‘severe drenches’. As discussed in chapter seven, internal parasites were a problem throughout the region. While the cows may have failed to conceive due to the drenching, or aborted, it is more likely that they were in poor condition due to the worm infestation and/or a shortage of nutritious pasture. The precise cause of the dry cows is irrelevant. Having only five profitable cows left out of the original twenty-three was a severe financial blow to Glare, but losses of this magnitude were not unusual for soldier settlers.

As noted in chapter six, prices were at their peak when the settlers bought their cows. The price of dairy cows reached £20.38 in 1919-20 and declined to nearly half in 1921-22 by which time the majority of soldier settlers had stocked their blocks.24 (Table 9.2) Thus, Glare's expenditure on dairy cows was likely to be about £437, the value of which had, with the high mortality rate and the decline in prices, slumped to approximately £140 when he relinquished dairying.25

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24 See Appendix three for the years when specific Estates were purchased. The C.S.B. Annual reports do not report the exact date the blocks were settled. It would have been some months after the purchase date to allow time for the sub division to take place.

25 This is making the conservative assumption that the ‘dry’ cows were worth about two thirds of the ones that were in calf. However these cows had been sick so they could have been worth considerably less.
Table 9.2. Average prices of dairy cows, 1918 - 1931

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Dairy cows (£A per head.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1918-19</td>
<td>17.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1919-20</td>
<td>20.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920-21</td>
<td>18.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921-22</td>
<td>10.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1922-23</td>
<td>14.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1923-24</td>
<td>12.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1924-25</td>
<td>12.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1925-26</td>
<td>11.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1926-27</td>
<td>11.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1927-28</td>
<td>11.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1928-29</td>
<td>10.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1929-30</td>
<td>11.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930-31</td>
<td>11.26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Davidson, *op. cit.*, 1981. p. 266. (Davidson has calculated these prices as decimals)

When Glare wrote to the C.S.B. detailing his losses, he had realised that his land was unsuitable for dairy farming and wanted to go into sheep. An Inquiry Board was convened and its members concluded that the failure of the enterprise was the settler's fault. Warrong was unsuitable for dairying but no written attempt was made to advise the settlers of this when they went onto their blocks. The documents in Glare’s file do not indicate whose idea it was for him to go in to dairying but it is reasonable to expect that his inspector was involved in the decision. As noted in the quotation at the start of this chapter, settlers were expected to take the responsibility for the unwise decision.

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PROV, VPRS 748, Box 61, L. E. Glare, Warrong Estate, Inquiry Board, 8.11.23. The relevant quotation is used at the start of this chapter.
Nutritional Deficiencies

The cows Glare lost during the summer died due to a shortage of food or water. The problems associated with trying to run livestock with an inadequate water supply have been addressed in chapter six. Losses, associated with the lack of improved pastures and insufficient supplementary feed to meet the high nutritional requirements of the lactating cow, were common on soldier settlement blocks during the first decade. The Department of Agriculture reported in 1919 that

about Hamilton on paddocks where the grass seems satisfactory and abundant, and on which adult store cattle will thrive, milking cows will die, unless provided with salt and bone meal. It was estimated that an ox stores 0.22 lbs of ash in a week and that the dairy cow secretes in her milk 1.35 lbs or seven times as much. Thus an ox will fatten where a dairy cow will die.27

Feed requirements for dairy cows vary depending on the cow’s size and her milking potential. In 1922, it was considered that

In full milk (a cow) should be given 1/10 of her body weight per day of a mixture equal to grasses and clovers in full bloom. ie: a cow 1,000 lbs in weight, giving three gallons of average quality milk, requires 100 lbs of feed per day. This should consist of about 75 lbs of water and 25 lbs of dry matter.28


28 R. T. Archer, (Senior Dairy Inspector) ‘Dairy farming’, Journal of the Department of Agriculture of Victoria, vol. XX, December 1922. While water is not usually regarded as ‘feed’, it is an essential part of the diet and necessary for metabolising the ‘dry matter’. ‘Dry matter’ in this instance refers to the feed after it has been dried and the water content removed.
These figures are a little lower than figures from the 1990s where it is estimated that an average milking cow will eat the equivalent of thirty-five pounds of dry matter per day.\textsuperscript{29} No evidence is available relating to the amount of pasture growth occurring, per day, during different times of the year in the 1920s. Using contemporary figures relating to the feeding of dairy cattle, assumptions can be made about pasture growth in the Hamilton district during the 1920s.

In Victoria, on improved pastures, winter growth during 1997 was, on average, eight to ten pounds of dry matter per acre per day.\textsuperscript{30} Soldier settlement blocks in the 1920s were unimproved in comparison with modern dairy farms so the level of growth would be lower.\textsuperscript{31} Therefore, on a farm running one dairy cow per 2.5 acres, cows would need supplementary feeding to maintain the status quo for both cow and pasture. It was reported to the Dairying Commission when it sat at Coleraine in April 1928 that J. R. Shady, a soldier settler, was running slightly less than one cow per two acres.\textsuperscript{32} Shady was more fortunate than other settlers in that he was able to grow oats and lucerne for cows and barley for pigs.\textsuperscript{33} This, or similar, fodder was essential if settlers were going to be successful dairy farming.


\textsuperscript{30} \textit{Ibid}.

\textsuperscript{31} This is in terms of both pasture development and the ability to grow supplementary feed.

\textsuperscript{32} Less than one cow per hectare.

\textsuperscript{33} \textit{Coleraine Albion}, 5.4.1928.
On native pastures, it would be impossible to manage dairy cows successfully without a substantial amount of good quality supplementary feed. Wadham considered that, while the need for handfeeding varied widely from district to district, it was seldom necessary for less than six months of the year. He suggested that summer feed shortages could be overcome by grazing selected pastures only lightly during the spring. The grasses were then allowed to run to seed and were used as roughage during the summer months. Later research has shown that dry feed is of poor digestibility and does not provide enough energy to maintain lactation. ‘Green pastures will always be of higher quality (55-85 per cent digestibility) than dead herbage (35 to 65 per cent digestibility) of the same species.’ The pastures on soldier settlement blocks in the 1920s would have been at the lower levels of digestibility. The non-digestible percentage passes through the cow as faeces and does not help in milk production or in maintenance of the cows’ condition.

Blocks were too small or undeveloped to permit the shutting up of paddocks to grow grain or pasture for fodder conservation. Victor Gladman of Warrong also

35 *ibid*.
attempted to milk cows but by 1922 wanted to give up dairying.\footnote{PROV, VPRS 748, Box 60, V. Gladman, Warrong Estate, lessee to C.S.B., 30.1.22. His cows would not have received the starchy food necessary to cause impaction from the pasture therefore he must have either grown (unlikely) or bought grain to feed his dairy cows.} His inspector agreed considering that the block was unsuitable unless ‘a plentiful supply of fodder is grown’.\footnote{\textit{ibid.}, Inspector Harrison to C.S.B., 17.2.22.} When settlers were unable to conserve their own fodder, the only alternative was to buy hay or grain for supplementary feeding. However, they usually lacked the financial resources. Gladman did manage to purchase fodder for his cows,\footnote{\textit{ibid.}, Land Board Report. 30.10.23.} but this was unsuitable and he lost eleven of his dairy cows through impaction.\footnote{Toxic disease of the rumen caused by animals eating unaccustomed fodder which is high in starches and sugars. See Appendix One: Glossary and chapter eight.}

Fodder availability was a continuing problem on dairying blocks. When nutritional requirements were not met, milk production declined. Cows would be likely to ‘dry off’ prematurely and being in poorer condition would be slower to cycle\footnote{Ready to mate. See Appendix One: Glossary.}, thus calving later in the following year.

Delayed conception had a considerable impact on the productivity of the enterprise. One Department of Agriculture research report ‘found that autumn and early winter calving produces on average about eleven per cent more milk and
butterfat than spring calving’. Also spring calving cows produced their maximum yield of milk when prices were at their lowest for the season. Those cows that calved late in the season decreased their production as the feed quality declined, with the strong probability that the milking period, and thus productivity, would be shortened. In 1928 the Department of Agriculture estimated that the life of a dairy cow is about 7.5 years, of which about five are of dairy usefulness. If the time of the year that the cow is dry (on average about three months) is added to the 2.5 years before coming into milk on the first calf, it will be seen that only about 1/2 a cow’s life is productive.

The productive life of a dairy cow was short enough without the cow failing to conceive again within the twelve month period. The Department of Agriculture estimated that ‘thousands of cows milk for only about six months per year’. The inadequate nutrition available on soldier settlement blocks ensured that the majority of settlers’ cows came into this category.

Delayed calving was a compounding problem. A cow may slip back and take thirteen or fourteen months between calving in the first year, then the same in the second year and so on. Unless her oestrus is brought forward, two things will

44 *ibid.*, p. 473.
45 *ibid.*, p. 472.
46 *ibid.*
happen. First, the cow will calve at inconvenient times of the year. Second, over a five year milking life, the cow will fail to produce one calf, and thus the equivalent of a whole year’s milk production. This was a significant problem for soldier settlers.

_Herd Testing_

Soldier settlement commenced during a time of considerable change in the dairy industry. In 1892 the Babcock tester, which enabled the accurate assessment of the butterfat content in milk, was first used in Victoria. With accurate testing, the payments to farmers increased as factories could no longer downgrade milk or cream as a matter of course. By 1921, government testers had commenced testing dairy herds in South Gippsland using a standardised test. The milk produced per cow was weighed over two consequent milkings and the butterfat tested with the Babcock tester. The herd testing movement spread from South Gippsland to the other dairy areas of the State. In 1921, R. T. Archer, a senior dairy inspector with the Department of Agriculture, summed up the advantages of herd testing:

> Herd testing can be looked upon as the foundation for dairying, for it is the only way by which one is able to discover which cows are capable of yielding sufficient butterfat to pay for their feed and the cost of their management, and of

48 _ibid._, p. 86.
giving enough surplus ‘to make it worth while’, in other words, to provide profit for the farmer.\textsuperscript{50}

In 1925, there were fourteen Herd Testing Associations and 21,500 cows under test. By 1927, the number of Associations had grown to ninety-six with 63,000 cows under test. Consequently, the average annual production of butterfat increased from 140 to 190 pounds per cow between 1921 and 1927.\textsuperscript{51}

Prior to this, dairy herds in Victoria had been of unknown quality. When herd testing was introduced in Victoria ‘up to 50% of some herds were found to be unprofitable as dairy cows’.\textsuperscript{52} Figure 9.1 provides comparative figures of the average yield of butterfat. In financial terms the average annual return per cow for the years 1930 - 1944 ranged from £10-19-3 for untested cows to £21-0-3 for cows tested with the Government Standard Test. During the 1920s and 1930s there were two methods of herd testing in use in Victoria. The results for cows tested under the United Herd Testing Association method was not as marked but the average annual return per cow was still £14-9-6. To obtain a difference of this magnitude, the farmers with tested cows must have culled their poor performers rigorously.

\textsuperscript{50} R. T. Archer, ‘Herd testing’, \textit{Journal of the Department of Agriculture of Victoria}, vol. XIX, August 1921, p. 484. The Standard Herd test was inaugurated in 1912.


\textsuperscript{52} Victorian United Cow Testing Associations, \textit{op. cit.}, May 1926, p. 286.
Figure 9.1. Tested and untested cows 1921-1944 (Average annual yield of butterfat in lbs)

Initially, soldier settlers in South West Victoria did not have access to a herd testing association. Therefore they were unable to take advantage of this technological advance and it is probable that a substantial number of their herd came from the unprofitable ‘50%’ of cows.\(^{53}\) Dairy cows were brought into the Western District from other dairying districts in the State and settlers were unable to assess their quality.\(^{54}\) As the herd testing associations spread into the Western District in the 1920s, inspectors encouraged soldier settlers to join their local association. H. A. Hill of Hilgay saw the benefits of the practice and in 1929 estimated that herd testing ‘secured a net gain of £3 per head last season’.\(^{55}\)

**Economics of Dairy Farming**

The poor quality land and restricted acreages meant that soldier settlers would have difficulty maintaining enough dairy cows to be economically viable. The average acreage of settlers on Warrong, Hilgay, Nangeela and Struan estates is outlined in Table 9.3. In attempting to estimate the number of dairy cows that could be maintained during the 1920s it is necessary to make some assumptions and reduce the figures to a common denominator. The average dry sheep

\(^{53}\) *ibid.*

\(^{54}\) Cattle for settlers on Nangeela Estate had been bought in Melbourne and transported to Casterton, PROV, VPRS 748, Box 12, G. C. Black, Nangeela Estate, lessee to C.S.B., 26.11.21.

\(^{55}\) ‘Farming on Hilgay’, *Coleraine Albion*, 6.6.29.
equivalent (DSE) rating for dairy cows is between 22 and 28.66 During the 1920s and 1930s, DSEs were not in use as a means of comparing stocking rates between classes of livestock; therefore a rough assumption has been made that one sheep in the anticipated stocking rate column equals one DSE.

Table 9.3. Approximate number of cows a soldier settlement block could carry during the 1920s and 1930s

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Estate</th>
<th>Average acreage57</th>
<th>Anticipated stocking rate in sheep per acre58</th>
<th>Estimated stocking rate in DSEs59</th>
<th>Anticipated stocking rate in dairy cows60</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hilgay</td>
<td>202.6</td>
<td>1.5 to 2</td>
<td>354.55</td>
<td>14.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nangeela</td>
<td>203.8</td>
<td>1 to 1.5</td>
<td>254.75</td>
<td>10.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Struan</td>
<td>118.3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>236.6</td>
<td>9.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warrong</td>
<td>374.6</td>
<td>Less that 1</td>
<td>280.95</td>
<td>11.24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The average size of Victorian dairy herds in 1930 was twenty-eight cows.61 The above estates were unlikely to carry more than half that number. Davison has calculated that the average cow would produce 150 lbs of butterfat per annum

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56 See Appendix one: Glossary for a description of DSE ratings in livestock. Reducing stocking rates to DSEs is the best way of working out how many dairy cows a soldier settlement block could run. This figure is still only approximate.

57 See Appendix three.

58 Taken from the land class information outlined in Table 11.1.

59 The estimated stocking rate for the block has been worked out by multiplying the acreage by the sheep per acre figure.

60 This figure has been calculated by taking 25 as the average DSE equivalent for dairy cows and dividing the estimated stocking rate in DSEs by this figure.

61 Davidson notes that figures are not available for the early 1920s. Davidson, op. cit., 1981, p. 270.
during the 1920s. Figure 9.1 indicates that this figure would be reasonable for untested cows and Table 9.4 shows the likely gross income for the settlers.

Table 9.4. Estimated gross return per block from dairying on selected soldier settlement estates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Estate</th>
<th>Estimated annual production of butterfat per block (lbs)</th>
<th>Anticipated gross return per annum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hilgay</td>
<td>2,127</td>
<td>£177.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nangeela</td>
<td>1,528.5</td>
<td>£127.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Struan</td>
<td>1,419</td>
<td>£118.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warrong</td>
<td>1,686</td>
<td>£140.40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The C.S.B. ‘took a carrying capacity of 20 to 25 cows as a living proposition for dairying’ and gave evidence to the Royal Commission that the subdivision was carried out with that figure in mind. The Commissioners conceded that ‘in the very difficult matter of subdivision, many mistakes were made’. By necessity, the figures in Tables 9.3 and 9.4 are approximate and they do not take into account that in addition, there would be calves, heifers and a bull running on the block. They do however, indicate that, on a purely economic basis, soldier settlers on these blocks would be unable to stock enough dairy cows to meet their commitments and maintain a reasonable standard of living for their families.

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62 ibid., p. 269.
63 Calculated from the estimated average stocking rate per block multiplied by the average output of 150 lbs butterfat per cow.
64 This figure is calculated assuming an average price of twenty pence per pound as outlined in Table 11.5.
66 ibid.
Dairy farming in the 1920s and 1930s was a labour intensive industry. The ‘small margin of profit’ ensured that the industry was a ‘family’ one with every available family member assisting.\(^{67}\) The Royal Commission on the Dairying Industry estimated that the cost of butterfat production was between one shilling and six pence and two shillings and sixpence per pound. The average price for the years 1926 – 28, including benefits from the Patterson scheme\(^{68}\), was approximately one shilling five and a half pence per pound.\(^{69}\)

The Royal Commission visited Coleraine in 1928. After their report was published, the *Coleraine Albion* published financial figures for a dairy enterprise in the Western District.\(^{70}\) The assumption was made that the value of the land necessary to carry one cow and the necessary dry stock was set at £100. It assumed that one man was doing the work on a farm running twenty cows. The capital outlay and costs and returns are outlined in Table 9.5.

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\(^{68}\) Under the Patterson Scheme, a levy of one and a half pence per pound was paid on all butter manufactured in Australia, and from this revenue, a bounty of three pence per pound on all butter exported overseas. By this means the price of butter to the consumer in Australia was automatically increased by three pence per pound. The gain to Victorian dairy farmers for the twelve months ended 20.12.26 was £650,754. *ibid.*, p. 11.

\(^{69}\) *ibid.*, pp. 6 – 7.

\(^{70}\) *Coleraine Albion*, 19.11.1928. This Table is also in the Report on the Royal Commission on the Dairy Industry, *op. cit.*, p. 7.
Table 9.5. Capital and working costs and returns of a Western District dairy farm in 1928

**Capital outlay**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Land to graze twenty cows @ £100 per cow</td>
<td>£2,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cows @ £10 per head</td>
<td>£200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three horses</td>
<td>£50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implements and sundries</td>
<td>£150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total capital outlay</strong></td>
<td><strong>£2,400</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Costs and returns**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Costs</th>
<th>Returns</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interest on capital outlay @ 6%</td>
<td>£144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Butterfat twenty cows averaging 200 lb = 4000 lbs at 1s 10d per lb.</td>
<td>£366-13-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wages @ £4-5 per week</td>
<td>£221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seed and manure</td>
<td>£24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pigs and sundries</td>
<td>£42-6-8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incidental expenses</td>
<td>£20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Costs</strong></td>
<td><strong>£409</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>£409</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


While these figures were compiled from evidence presented to the Royal Commission there are several errors and omissions when they are applied to soldier settlers. Table 9.5 assumes that Western District dairy farms were above the State average for both price and butterfat production. The ‘wages’ probably refer to the drawings of the farmer for living expenses. The sum allowed to soldier settlers by the C.S.B. for living expenses was considerably less than this figure.\(^{71}\) No mention is made of the cost of a bull or replacement cows in the event of fatalities. Interest payments are included but there is no reference to

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\(^{71}\) In 1927, Robert Beard was allowed twenty-five shillings living expenses per week. PROV, VPRS 748, Box 9, R. E. Beard, Warrong Estate, Evidence present to Inquiry Board, 8.7.27.
principal repayments, which soldier settlers also had to endeavour to meet. The majority of soldier settlers were in arrears with their instalments, therefore the interest bill would be higher.

The figures in Table 9.5 imply that dairy farming was not a particularly profitable enterprise. However, this was shortly before the start of the 1930s Depression and if a dairy farmer could make enough to meet his commitments and living expenses, he would be in a better position than other members of the rural community. Table 9.6 shows the average price of butterfat during the first decade of soldier settlement. On these figures, the price of twenty-two pence per pound cited above was better than the figures computed by Davidson.72 However, the price of butterfat fluctuated throughout the year which could account for the difference.

72 Davidson has calculated the price of butterfat for Australia. See Appendix Seven: Commodity Prices for Victorian figures. There is some variation.
Table 9.6. Prices of Butterfat, 1920 – 1931

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Butterfat /pence per lb.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1920-21</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921-22</td>
<td>13.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1922-23</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1923-24</td>
<td>16.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1924-25</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1925-26</td>
<td>15.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1926-27</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1927-28</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1928-29</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1929-30</td>
<td>15.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930-31</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Davidson, op. cit., 1981. p. 266.

Managerial Farmers or ‘Yeomen’

Soldier settlers were criticized for being inexperienced and while they did not receive adequate training, they had several opportunities to increase their farming knowledge if they chose to participate. During the 1920s and 1930s, the ‘Better Farming Train’ toured Victoria, instructing the state’s farmers in their chosen field of farming, including herd testing, the latest pasture cultivars and fertiliser application. From the time they went onto their blocks, soldier settlers were encouraged by their inspectors to adopt modern scientific farming methods.

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73 In 1933 the Better Farming Train visited Western District towns going to Warrnambool, Port Fairy, Hawkesdale, Coleraine, Portland, Heywood, Condah, Merino and Casterton. The average attendance at each venue was 550 persons. NB. The train catered for both men and women. Journal of the Department of Agriculture of Victoria, December 1933.


75 Pasture species including subterranean clover, ryegrass and phalaris.
This was particularly important in dairying where the butter factory could
accurately test the quality of the product.

By 1930, well-attended dairy farming classes were being held in Coleraine, and
the Coleraine Albion published several pages from the proceedings. Senior
dairymen from the Department of Agriculture conducted the classes and the
reports show that dairy farmers were advised to adopt modern scientific farming
practices. Topics discussed included: the necessity of providing a pure milk
supply; pasture improvement and top dressing; dairy sanitation; animal health;
herd testing; animal breeding; and record keeping.

During the 1920s, a management competition for local dairy farmers was run in
conjunction with the Coleraine Show. The comments provided for J. Keating, a
soldier settler on Struan, are in Table 9.7.

Table 9.7. Results of dairy farming competition for J. Keating, Struan (1926)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>120 acres subdivided into five paddocks, fenced with plain and barbed wire.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nine acres oats (hay), three acres barley, one acre mangles(^\text{77}) (grown for pigs) twenty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>acres pasture top-dressed with 112 lbs superphosphate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water supply: dam with windmill, (fenced).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thirty-two grade cows, seven young stock, one jersey bull, nine pigs, three horses, sixty fowls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No cream storing room.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four-room residence built on lower position than cowshed, yards and pigsties.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marks were lost in all categories.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Coleraine Albion. 11.3.1926.

\(^{76}\) Coleraine Albion, 1 - 22 May 1930.

\(^{77}\) A variety of beet with a bulb larger than a garden beet. Grown for cattle feed.
For soldier settlers to be taking part in competitions of this nature, only six years after they went onto their blocks, indicates that a minority at least, saw themselves as professional farmers prepared to be judged and criticised in comparison with their peers. While only sixteen dairy farmers took part in the competition, another nine took part in a mixed farming competition, run along similar lines, the same year. These were good participation rates for competitions of this nature, when the entrants would know that they were likely to receive critical appraisal in their local newspaper. Initiatives of this nature show that, at a practical level, the ‘yeoman myth’ had been abandoned.

Conclusion

Soldier settlers were encouraged to engage in dairy farming because of a perception that they could start earning an income immediately. The administration of the post-World War Two scheme adopted the sensible axiom that settlers develop their blocks before they maximised their production. Dairying was one enterprise where it was essential that the pastures were reasonably well developed. Initially, few soldier settlement blocks came into this category. The size of the blocks was also inadequate in light of the estimated carrying capacity. With adequate pasture and improved economic conditions soldier settlers would continue to struggle if they did not stock good quality cows. It was generally accepted that the majority of soldier settlers were lacking in experience, therefore they should not have been blamed for making the unwise decision to embark on dairy farming. Inspectors and Supervisors must bear a
considerable amount of the responsibility for the heavy losses that resulted.

The next chapter will consider the interaction between soldier settlers and the administration with particular reference to their relationship with the local inspector. The main time period covered in this chapter dates from the appointment of the Royal Commission until the onset of the Depression.
Chapter Ten

The Settlers’ Interaction with the Administration

The benefit to the State from settlement on the land by the increase in production, the additional freight for the railways, the manufacture of farming implements, and the supply of the other requirements of settlers should not be lost sight of when land settlement is under review.

*Report of the Closer Settlement Board. 1925.*

Many settlers struggled on for years, trying to make a success of blocks of inadequate size, but had to give up the attempt. Those settlers still on their farms and still struggling are some of the finest farmers in the State.

*Hon. W. S. Manifold, MLC.*

*Introduction*

During the 1920s, as the deterioration in economic conditions intensified and the financial losses grew, the Commonwealth and State governments became more involved with soldier settlement. While the conventional wisdom has been that the Great Depression started in the late 1920s, the situation for farmers in general, and soldier settlers in particular, was somewhat different. The Depression was a continuation of an already difficult situation. For the majority of soldier settlers, the 1920s was a hard decade in which their interaction with both the administration and society in general became increasingly strained.

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3. One also shared by the unemployed in the city and country. Throughout Australia the level of unemployment ranged from six to eleven per cent during the 1920s. Unskilled and casual labour was worst affected. Macintyre, *op. cit.*, 1986, pp. 213-4.
This chapter analyses the interaction between the soldier settlers and the
governing bureaucracy during the first decade on the blocks. The most direct
relationship was between the settlers and their inspectors. This contact was on-
going, and will be examined in detail. It was influenced by the State government's
reaction to the mounting losses and the decline in the settlers’ prospects. In
addition there were also several other points of interaction⁴ including the Royal
Commission;⁵ the Inquiry Boards, and, to a lesser extent, the investigation into
the losses of the various state soldier settlement schemes conducted by Mr Justice
Pike.⁶ The Royal Commission and the report by Mr Justice Pike are referred to,
where appropriate, throughout the thesis.

Numerous legislative changes took place during the 1920s, as attempts were made
to address the problems of the scheme.⁷ These changes were administered, at a
local level, by the inspectors who were an important element in the soldier settlers
subsequent success or failure. If the settler rejected the inspector’s advice, the
C.S.B. became more inclined to suggest that he vacate his block. However, if the
settler took the advice offered, he could face increased expense, heavy physical
and financial losses, and possibly still fail. There were some settlers who did

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⁴ See Appendix Six: Outline of the Inquiries and the Royal Commission.
⁶ Pike, op. cit., 1929.
manage to survive by deliberately ignoring the inspector’s advice. As was shown in chapters eight and nine, inspectors tended to give advice that would, in an ideal situation, maximise the settler's returns. Unfortunately for the participants soldier settlement was not an ideal situation.

This chapter starts with a general discussion of the inspectors and their role as advisors and C.S.B. overseers. Several of the more controversial requirements of the administration are then analysed to show the difficulties encountered by settlers. These included the selling of breeding stock to pay arrears in instalments to the Board and the regulation that liens be signed when settlers were over £300 in arrears. The residency requirements of the Soldier Settlement Act show that both the C.S.B. and inspectors were selective in their enforcement of the legislation. The Board and their inspectors had problems determining when settlers were genuinely in difficulties or alternatively, trying to gain greater concessions. The discussion on concessions leads to an examination of what the C.S.B. actually thought of the soldier settlers in South West Victoria. The chapter concludes with an examination of the Inquiry Boards appointed in 1927 to assess the advisability of providing concessions to individual soldier settlers.

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8 PROV, VPRS 748, Box 26, Murdoch Campbell, Elderslie Estate, Inquiry Board, 4-5-30.
Background

By the end of the 1920s, a substantial majority of settlers were heavily in arrears⁹ while a significant number had been forced to vacate their holdings. Without examining every file in PROV, VPRS 748 it is impossible to establish exactly how many settlers had failed by the onset of the Depression. Table 10.1 gives a conservative indication of the number of settlers who had forfeited their blocks.

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⁹ All but one of the settlers in the sample examined for this thesis were behind with their payments to the C.S.B. by the end of the 1920s.
Table 10.1. The number of settlers who had forfeited their blocks by 1929

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Estate</th>
<th>Acreage</th>
<th>Number of Settlers</th>
<th>Forfeitures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chrome</td>
<td>3,498</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dolmans</td>
<td>753</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elderslie</td>
<td>36,906</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glenorchy</td>
<td>12,474</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greenhills</td>
<td>5,330</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gringegalgona</td>
<td>29,641</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hensley Park</td>
<td>39,63</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hilgay</td>
<td>66,86</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knebsworth</td>
<td>2,500</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kongbool</td>
<td>5,449</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Konongwootong Nth</td>
<td>11,130</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korongah</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murndal</td>
<td>696</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nangeela</td>
<td>3,057</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Struan</td>
<td>4,613</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tahara</td>
<td>1,203</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toolong</td>
<td>337</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trangnars</td>
<td>452</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warrong</td>
<td>23,223</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wollaston</td>
<td>686</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>402</strong></td>
<td><strong>69</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Annual Report of the Closer Settlement Board for the year ended 30th June 1929. VPP. 1929. These figures do not include settlers on blocks purchased for less than £6,000 or those on Section 20 blocks.

This figure is somewhat misleading, as it does not include settlers who agreed to transfer or who sold their blocks. The C.S.B. would make promises to settlers to

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See Table 11.1 for a breakdown of the number of settlers who had left their blocks throughout Victoria. On a state wide basis the C.S.B. differentiated between settlers who had abandoned and cancelled their leases and those who had transferred and surrendered their blocks.
encourage them to transfer their blocks. This was not the same as forfeiture where the settler either absconded, or was sold up. For example, while the C.S.B. Annual Report states that six Elderslie settlers had forfeited their blocks, only seventeen of the original thirty five settlers were left on the estate by 1930.

The Relationship Between Inspectors and Soldier Settlers

Interaction between settlers and the C.S.B. was usually conducted by letter and where any doubt existed, the local inspector would be sent to obtain a report. Inspectors were kept under scrutiny and were likely to be rebuked if they were not seen to be protecting the Board’s interests. The C.S.B laid down detailed duties for inspectors, which were described in the Report of the Royal Commission:

> To be generally responsible for all matters pertaining to land settlement in their districts; to furnish reports as required by the Board; to supervise and advise settlers in the working of their blocks; to collect and receive payments on behalf of the Board; to report upon and make recommendations on applications for advances to settlers; to advise settlers in regard to purchases of stock and equipment; to exercise supervision over vacant blocks in their districts, and to [sic] the appointment of caretakers to prevent the illegal use thereof; and to keep such office records as may be laid down.

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11 Dave Pahl was offered all of his wheat proceeds if he submitted an application to transfer the block within three months. PROV VPRS 748, Box 122, D. M. Pahl, Elderslie estate, C.S.B. to lessee, 5.3.30.

12 PROV, VPRS 748, Box 9, G, Beavis, Section 20, Inspector Hamill to the C.S.B., 4.7.35.

13 Overview of Elderslie Estate provided by Wally Douglas (Elderslie estate) to W. S. Manifold, MLC, 1930.

14 Royal Commission on Soldier Settlement, 1925, p. 10.
In addition to the inspectors, a number of supervisors were employed to investigate cases where lessees were not making sufficient progress, ‘through not working on the right lines, or through causes other than lack of energy’.\textsuperscript{15} Supervisors were then to advise the settler and direct them in the working of their allotments. This became known as ‘the settler working under supervision’.\textsuperscript{16} Supervisors were also directed to liaise with the inspectors and advise them if necessary. This ensured that inspectors were not left as sole arbiters of settlers' farming methodology and direction.

L. V. Donehue of Chrome Estate, described as ‘a good worker but a poor manager’, was ‘working under supervision’ in 1926.\textsuperscript{17} Donehue considered he was doing his best and that there were other factors involved. He pointed out that he had a wife and six children to keep:

\begin{quote}
I don’t spend money foolishly, I don’t drink and I don’t have a motor car. … I haven’t been to Melbourne since I came home from the war. I don’t want to complain but you don’t know what we are up against on these small holdings.\textsuperscript{18}
\end{quote}

While there is evidence to suggest that Donehue was not a good manager, the above remarks suggest that he saw his financial position as caused more by the

\textsuperscript{15} ibid. The ‘lack of energy’ could have been caused by illness and the after-effects of war service, not the implied laziness.

\textsuperscript{16} ibid.

\textsuperscript{17} PROV, VPRS 748, Box 44, L. V. Donehue, Chrome Estate, Inspector to C.S.B., 19.4.26.

\textsuperscript{18} ibid., lessee to C.S.B., 30.4.28.
size of his block than by his managerial ability. As conditions worsened, it became clear that, irrespective of the inspector's or supervisor's guidance, a significant number of soldier settlers on small holdings were going to find it increasingly difficult to remain on their blocks without radical changes to the administration of soldier settlement.

It is difficult to analyse the inspectors. Traces of their personal opinions can be seen in their comments on individual soldier settlers. They were involved in an administrative process and necessarily had to be circumspect in respect to their opinions. Therefore, any conclusions arrived at are necessarily tentative.

Inspectors were the local face of the C.S.B. who were expected to ensure that the settlers met their financial commitments.

This was an impossible, and ultimately frustrating task. Little information is available on the majority of inspectors' or supervisors' agricultural and financial qualifications. The Rural Reconstruction Commission, Second Report referred to them as often having ‘no modern agricultural training, in several cases the advisers were men who had themselves failed as farmers’. If correct, this was an indictment of the system if it allowed failed farmers to advise inexperienced men on how to run their farms. However there are indications that the above may have

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19 See below.

been an unnecessarily pessimistic view propagated by some aging soldier settlers with unpleasant recollections of inspectors. The majority of the inspectors’ reports for South West Victoria indicate men with at least some practical knowledge of farming. As shown in chapters eight and nine, they did give inappropriate advice to some settlers, but it is possible that they were acting under instructions from the Board.21 Inspectors were advising settlers during two of the most difficult decades in the twentieth century for the farming sector. The constantly changing economic situation would make much of their advise irrelevant almost immediately.

The files contain no indication of the criteria used by the C.S.B. in choosing inspectors but at least one local soldier settler was appointed, J. E. Hindaugh of Warrong. He understood the potential difficulties that could arise in his dual positions, stating that he ‘did not want to do any work that would cause ill feeling with his neighbours’.22 This appointment gives a rare opportunity to gain background information on the inspector. Hindaugh was forty years of age when he was interviewed for his Qualification Certificate. Before his war service he had been farming for four years and had spent the rest of his working life as a farm

21 Two notable examples were the continued promotion of cropping and dairying on unsuitable land.

22 ‘Inspector Hindaugh to receive £156 per annum inclusive of travelling expenses.’ Series 5714. Box 1258, Warrong Inspector’s File, 9.1.22.
labourer. In 1925, his supervisor considered him one of the best farmers in the area. Hindaugh's Advances file supports this assessment but he still had financial difficulties during the 1920s. Hindaugh's case illustrates the problems faced by soldier settlers in the region. Since the C.S.B. held his ability in such high regard, and his returns for the first four years were exceptionally good, it is reasonable to assume that he was a good farmer. If a farmer of his calibre drifted into arrears then less experienced men would have had little hope of meeting their commitments.

Another inspector was Edward Murphy, an ex-dairy inspector who wrote numerous articles for the *Journal of the Department of Agriculture of Victoria* and the *Hamilton Spectator* on the dairy industry and the benefits of pasture improvement. Several of Murphy’s articles are referred to in this thesis and they show a good understanding of the scientific farming knowledge which existed at that time.

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23 PROV, VPRS 748, Box 74, J. E. Hindaugh, Warrong Estate, Qualification Certificate documentation.

24 *ibid.*, Supervisor’s Report, 20.3.25. His costs and returns for the first four years are detailed in chapter six, Table 6.6.

25 This was partially due to heavy stock losses through impaction. For a discussion on the causes of impaction and its effect on Hindaugh see chapter seven: Animal Pathology.

The relationship between the local inspector and the settlers under his jurisdiction was a contentious one. Lake has been critical, seeing the inspectors as an instrument of state control.\textsuperscript{27} She considers that they reduced settlers to the level of ‘slaves’ by their insistence that they worked methodically and did not stray from their farms.\textsuperscript{28}

Lake's analysis fails to address several important points about both farming and soldier settlement. Soldier settlers had been allocated an expensive, and potentially valuable, asset over which there was usually little security. It is reasonable to expect the state to keep a close watch on its interests and one of the inspector's roles was to oversee this investment. If the settler succeeded, the C.S.B. got its money back and everyone was a winner. Both the inspector and the settler had the same long-term objective, namely the success of the latter. To achieve this, the settler would have to create a viable enterprise out of virtually nothing. As shown in chapter five, while the majority of the men had experience as farm labourers, they were inexperienced as farm managers. It is not unreasonable to expect inspectors to have provided instruction where necessary.

Even in a relatively closely settled region like South West Victoria, roads were bad and transportation was primitive. Each inspector had to look after a

\textsuperscript{27} Lake, \textit{op. cit.}, 1987, p. 77.

\textsuperscript{28} \textit{ibid.}
considerable number of soldier settlers. The evidence in the Advances files indicates that, under normal circumstances, the average soldier settler was visited at approximate six monthly intervals. At this time, a report on his progress was made to the C.S.B. Where soldier settlers were in financial difficulties, or otherwise deemed to require special attention, the visits were more frequent. This level of scrutiny does not seem excessive or likely to cause the majority to see themselves as ‘slaves’.

While men who failed were more likely to see their labour as ‘slavery’, others recognised the need for hard work. The view of the soldier settler as ‘slave’ to the bureaucracy fails to take into account the significant number of settlers who refused to vacate their blocks during the Depression when there was no economic reason for remaining in occupation. This group will be discussed in more detail in chapter eleven. W. A. Lambert of Struan wrote to the C.S.B. in 1925 to state his position:

I have not wasted or fooled money away and it has all gone in improvements … I set out to make a home here for my wife and children and I have striven my utmost and hope to win through. I wish to ask if the Board could capitalise my

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29 Inspector Murphy was based in Casterton and oversaw all the settlers in the surrounding districts. These included thirty-five on Elderslie, fifteen on Nangeela and thirty-nine on Struan. They were also responsible for an unknown number of Section 20 settlers (See Appendix one: Glossary) and civilians on closer settlement blocks. Other inspectors were responsible for a similar number of men.

30 This was a ‘pink’ form report. For an example see appendix nine.
land for some of my liability as it is well improved and gives me a fighting chance as I must win through in time.31

Similarly, H. A. Hill of Hilgay commented in 1927 that ‘My hours of work for the past year have been from 5 AM to 7 PM in order to save the wages of an assistant’.32 John McGrath of the same Estate reported to the C.S.B. in 1930 that ‘I am shearing 600 sheep single handed to save expense so you can be sure I am working a bit harder than you are likely to’.33

These were not men who resented having to work but who realised that hard work was essential if they were to have any hope of success. As Lake has detailed there was a perception under the yeoman ideology that ‘hard work led inexorably to success’. This was patently untrue but the corollary applied. Settlers who did not work hard were unlikely to be successful.

The settlers’ relationship with their district inspectors was to continue as long as they were in debt. The inspectors’ effectiveness in guiding settlers can be assessed by looking at the quality of their advice, coupled with their treatment of settlers. They were only human and unfortunately for the men under their jurisdiction, mistakes were made.

31 PROV, VPRS 748, Box 91, W. A. Lambert, Struan Estate, lessee to C.S.B., 21.4.25.
32 PROV, VPRS 748, Box 74, H. A. Hill, Hilgay Estate, lessee to C.S.B., 19.1.27.
33 PROV, VPRS 748, Box 111, J. McGrath, Hilgay Estate, lessee to C.S.B., 16.10.30.
34 Lake, op. cit., 1987, p. 76.
In a number of cases, doubt remains as to who actually made managerial decisions. L. V. Donehue reported to the C.S.B. in 1928 that he had not bought any sheep at all during the first twelve months as his inspector thought they were too expensive.\(^{35}\) Donehue finally bought 221 seven-year ewes for twenty-five shillings per head. In the first year, he lost twenty-three head and managed to rear 160 lambs. Donehue intended to sell them the following year but the price was too low and he was only offered two shillings and sixpence per head. He mated them again and lost sixty head while only rearing twenty lambs. Donehue sold the remainder for seven shillings and eight pence per head. Today in the Western District, ewes, grazed on good pastures and well looked after, are usually sold for slaughter at a maximum age of six to seven years. Donehue did not buy the sheep until they were old enough to be culled, and then kept them for a further two years. Nine-year-old ewes would cut little wool and were well past their reproductive prime. If the inspector had suggested buying the sheep, he was advising a purchase at above market rates.\(^{36}\) To have kept them for a further two years was false economy, as they would never be profitable. Donehue reported that he had originally taken the inspector's advice not to buy sheep. He then stated that he had purchased sheep, which suggests that the inspector had not been involved. However, over the next two years the inspector should have advised

\(^{35}\) PROV, VPRS 748, Box 44, L. V. Donehue, Chrome Estate, lessee to C.S.B., 30.4.28.

\(^{36}\) The average price for merino ewes in 1920-21 was £.97 per head and in 1921-22 was £.66 per head. Davidson, \textit{op. cit.}, 1981, p. 266.
him to dispose of the cast-for-age\textsuperscript{37} sheep at a loss, in order to purchase younger, potentially more profitable, sheep.

The attitudes of inspectors varied dramatically. While a number were prepared to provide a degree of support for the settler in disputes with the Board, others did the opposite. Inspector Blake of Apsley had a particularly bad reputation with the settlers in his district. The Advances Files for settlers on Elderslie Estate indicate that he entered into ad hoc business dealings with a number of settlers. It is not recorded whether these ventures were against the rules of the Board.

One of Inspector Blake’s business dealings was with William Capelhorn. In 1929, Blake bought sheep in partnership with Capelhorn and did not tell the C.S.B.\textsuperscript{38} The sheep had been bought for a quick turnover but the price fell and there was no hope of selling them without losing money. Capelhorn thought Blake had bought the sheep in shares with him and that they were to share half the profit or loss. However, Blake had bought all the sheep in the lessee’s name. A change in inspector occurred and the stock agents wanted to be paid for the stock. An Inquiry Board was convened and it was reported that Capelhorn did not know how much the sheep had cost, whether they had been sold, or what the wool had realised. The Board concluded that ‘It all seemed a poor business’, but

\textsuperscript{37} Cast-for-age sheep are reject animals past their economic lives. They are often broken-mouthed (missing some or all of their teeth). See Appendix One. Glossary.

\textsuperscript{38} PROV, VPRS 748, Box 26, W. Capelhorn, Elderslie Estate, lessee to C.S.B., 17.1.30.
recommended that things should continue without change, noting that Capelhorn nearly broke down several times during the Inquiry.\textsuperscript{39} There seems to have been a conflict of interest on the part of the inspector but the file does not contain enough evidence to attribute blame. Capelhorn was heavily in arrears and in no position to stand up for his rights; consequently, he had to bear the loss. It is hinted in another file that Blake may have been dismissed by the C.S.B. but this is not mentioned in the C.S.B. Minutes.\textsuperscript{40}

Inspector Murphy adopted a more sympathetic attitude towards settlers although his opinion of them changed rapidly if he felt they were not trying or had been deceitful. Murphy was initially sympathetic towards Peter Martinich of Elderslie but later revised his opinion. ‘This man is most decidedly a muddler, though a worker.’\textsuperscript{41} Martinich had problems at the time and it is impossible to know how much of his ‘muddling’ was due to his financial and emotional position. Murphy wrote that ‘He works too hard and does not think clearly or thoroughly’.\textsuperscript{42} Could any man really be blamed for not thinking clearly when he was destitute, saw his sheep dying and was trying to grub out four hundred acres of gum saplings with a mattock in worn-out boots?

\textsuperscript{39} \textit{ibid.}, Report of Inquiry Board, 15.5.30.

\textsuperscript{40} PROV, VPRS 748, Box 77, D. Crabtree, Elderslie Estate, lessee to C.S.B., 10.10.30.

\textsuperscript{41} PROV, VPRS 748, Box 97, P. J. Martinich, lessee to C.S.B., 30.3.31.

\textsuperscript{42} \textit{ibid}.
I am practically bootless and I have even patched the uppers of my boots and will be barefooted in a month and it is impossible to grub out gum suckers without boots.43

Murphy’s dealings with Martinich illustrate several important points. The first is that the inspector was privy to the settler’s entire financial situation. He heard all the settler’s problems and had to assess whether the settler was genuine or attempting to paint an excessively grim picture. He had to deal with settlers who were at ‘the limits of hope’44 and help them over periods in which they felt like giving up. Finally, settlers were expected to pay as much as possible to the Board in order to reduce their arrears but they could get into even greater financial difficulty by making excessive payments and not keeping enough for living and working expenses.45

It is probable that inspectors did not always tell the C.S.C. when settlers were doing off-farm work and retaining the money for their personal use. In 1932, Mrs Maisie Campbell, the wife of Murdoch Campbell of Elderslie, fed a gang of road workers for several months. She received £5 per week for looking after ten men, when, according to her daughter, sheep were only worth one shilling and sixpence

‘I have neither working shirt or boots and my garments are mere rags and my credit has been stopped at the store as they know I should have funds to pay at this time so my family shall soon be without food.’ PROV, VPRS 748, Box 97, P. J. Martinich, lessee to C.S.B., 3.3.31.

Marilyn Lake’s term is very appropriate for settlers who were in severe financial difficulties.

See chapter eleven: The Great Depression. Efficiency will Save the Day - Triers Have to Go
per head. The men also brought extra vegetables from their homes in Casterton every week.46 At the same time, Murdoch Campbell worked on the road, receiving eight shillings a day for shovelling gravel. The enterprise would have been profitable for the family, providing much-needed cash flow.47 Inspector Murphy also lived in Casterton so it is probable that he knew where the workers were staying. It would not be hard to find out, as soldier settlers occupied all the farms in the district. However, the files do not indicate that the C.S.B. ever found out about the work.

Irrespective of the deteriorating economic climate for the rural sector during the 1920s, the files confirm that the C.S.B. (and a number of inspectors) considered that soldier settlers were still responsible for their own predicament. Settlers in arrears were expected to make definite proposals for reducing their debts. W. T. Gleisner of Warrong requested an examination by an Inquiry Board in 1927.48 The Board was not impressed with him as ‘the settler is hopelessly drifting and can make no suggestions of repayments’. As conditions worsened, this became a common refrain on ‘pink’ form reports as settlers were asked how they intended to reduce their arrears.

46 From interview with Miss Josie Campbell conducted at her home in Edenhope. 3.7.1995. (Daughter of Murdoch Campbell - settler on Elderslie Estate)

47 ‘Cash flow’ refers to the movement of cash in or out of the farm enterprise. In this case cash coming in was more important.

48 PROV, VPRS 748, Box 61, W. T. Gleisner, Warrong Estate, Inquiry Board, 2.6.27.
This harassment was not very sensible, as settlers had no control over the majority of factors that affected their profitability. They could provide an optimistic answer in the hope of satisfying the C.S.B. in the short term. Optimism was unwise as the Board made a point of reminding them of their promise when they failed to comply.

Inspectors, through an understanding of the settlers’ personal situation, were sometimes able to provide additional help. Michael Kelly, a settler on Korongah Estate near Warrnambool, showed signs of alcoholism, probably connected to his war service. In an effort to help, Inspector Bowman arranged for Kelly’s shares in the butter factory to be transferred to Mrs Kelly because of the ‘drunken habits of her husband’. Bowman felt that Kelly might spend all the money on strong drink, leaving nothing for Mrs Kelly and the five children. Inspectors had a considerable say over what settlers did on their blocks but numerous settlers, who consistently received poor reports, including Kelly, managed to survive.

It is probable that settlers, seeing their local inspectors as the visible face of the C.S.B., blamed them for matters, which were beyond their control. Inspectors were in an invidious position with the C.S.B. pressuring them to ensure that soldier settlers met their commitments. Having a first-hand understanding of the

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49 PROV, VPRS 748, Box 87, M. Kelly, Korongah Estate, Inspector Bowman to C.S.B., 25.4.31.
settlers’ position, they would be able to see that there was little hope of even
token payments to the Board.

_Selling Breeding Stock to Pay Arrears_

One particularly frustrating problem occurred for a number of soldier settlers,
who were substantially in arrears and, had no hope of rectifying the situation.
These settlers were forced to obey the directives of their inspector and sell
breeding stock to pay their arrears. This was unrealistic, as the stock would have
to be replaced, possibly at even greater expense, in the future. Therefore, while a
short-term improvement in the settler’s account occurred in the C.S.B.’s books,
the arrears were likely to increase in the long term.

E. Moore of Warrong had arrears of £631-5-1 in 1925 when he complained to the
C.S.B. that he had bought 300 sheep for twenty-seven shillings per head and then
had been forced to sell them for sixteen shillings to reduce his arrears.50 His
inspector had described him in 1923 as ‘A very sound type of settler who should
be successful’.51 Then in January 1926, Moore was advanced another £200 to
replace the sheep. While there may have been a reasonable explanation for the
C.S.B.’s actions, selling the sheep could have been administrative incompetence.

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50 PROV, VPRS 748, Box 8, E. Moore, Warrong Estate, lessee to C.S.B., 3.12.25.
51 _ibid._, Inspector to C.S.B., 27.4.23.
Similarly, in 1930 David Crabtree complained to the Board that Inspector Blake had forced him to sell sheep at unfavourable prices in order to reduce his arrears. He then had to buy replacements through Dalgety’s and take out a stock mortgage with the firm. This would have been at a higher interest rate as, in the event of the lessee's failure, the stock firm would be unlikely to recoup the full cost of the sheep. The C.S.B. ignored Crabtree's letter, perhaps either condoning this practice or not believing him.

Selling livestock to make payments became increasingly common as the Board came under growing political pressure to improve its financial position. These settlers would then have to purchase replacement stock often financing them privately. It is impossible to know whether these were deliberate attempts on the part of the C.S.B. to improve their books, or of inspectors taking the initiative. The Board may have been trying to shift the lessees’ debts on to the private sector.

While inspectors instructed settlers to sell livestock to reduce their arrears, they disapproved of settlers trading in sheep of their own volition. In 1925, C. A. Dougheney of Glenorchy sold his sheep in full wool instead of shearing them.

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52 PROV, VPRS 748, Box 77, D. J. Crabtree, Elderslie Estate, lessee to C.S.B., 30.3.30.
53 Dalgety’s were stock and station agents.
54 They would only have a second mortgage after the C.S.B.
55 PROV, VPRS 748, Box 44, C. A. Dougheney, Glenorchy Estate, lessee to C.S.B., 5.5.25. That is, shortly before they were due to be shorn.
This earned him an adverse comment from his inspector in a ‘pink’ form report.\textsuperscript{56}

The economics of the transactions reveal more about the prejudices of the inspector than they do about the settler’s poor management. Dougheney had purchased the first mob of sheep for twenty-six shillings per head. He then sold them for forty-three shillings and restocked with bare shorn sheep for twenty-six shillings, as he feared a decline in the price of wool. Ignoring the buying and selling costs, the settler made seventeen shillings per head on the transaction. The 527 sheep in the mob gave a gross return of £448. If Dougheney had kept the sheep and shorn them, he would have cut a maximum of eight pounds per head at a theoretical price of two shillings per pound.\textsuperscript{57} This gave a maximum gross return of £422, ignoring shearing and selling costs. Dougheney had a ‘light’ block and could only run wethers which would have had to be replaced in the long term.

In retrospect, for a settler in poor health\textsuperscript{58} to make slightly more money by not shearing his sheep does not seem like bad management. If Dougheney had shorn the sheep, he (or the C.S.B.) would have waited approximately six months for their money until the wool was sold.

\textsuperscript{56} ibid., ‘pink’ form report, 18.3.26.

\textsuperscript{57} Average price for Western District merino wool in 1926 wool selling season. Victoria Year Book, Victorian Government Printer, Melbourne, 1927.

\textsuperscript{58} PROV, VPRS 748, Box 44, C. A. Dougheney, Glenorchy Estate, Qualification Certificate documentation.
Liens

One of the more difficult tasks of the inspectors was to obtain the settlers’ signatures on lien agreements. Soldier settlers who were in arrears found it increasingly difficult to make independent financial decisions. When they were over £300 behind in their payments to the Board, liens\(^59\) were taken out and all, or a predetermined percentage, of their income went directly towards reducing these arrears. Liens were usually signed for a five-year period. This caused a considerable amount of trouble for settlers and their other creditors.\(^60\) At a meeting in Hamilton in 1930, P. T. Dix from Greenhills Estate condemned five-year liens. Dix stated that as soon as the shopkeepers knew that a lien had been signed, the settler had no hope of obtaining any further credit to feed his wife and family.\(^61\) The shopkeeper would have had little chance of being paid and, understandably, did not want to lose more money.

Stock agents were also loath to handle stock for soldier settlers who were under a lien agreement and, even if the men could get stock accepted for sale, private buyers were reluctant to bid on them. If the settler sold them privately and kept the money, the C.S.B. tried to find out who had bought them, and if successful,  

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\(^{59}\) See Appendix One: Glossary. Liens were signed documents which gave the C.S.B. the legal right to a predetermined percentage of the proceeds of the settlers’ account sales towards reducing their debts.

\(^{60}\) Once the settler was under lien to the C.S.B., outside creditors were unlikely to receive any repayments.

endeavour to force the buyer to pay the Board for the stock.  

A number of settlers who were not under lien found themselves in the invidious position of finding their names circulated on lists of settlers who were. Arthur Ball of Mocamboro found his name presented to Dalgetys in 1929. He reminded the C.S.B. that he had always paid his instalments out of his wool proceeds and was not in arrears. His protest was to no avail as the Board ignored his complaint. This was not unusual and it was hard for settlers to get their names removed from lien lists. Understandably, the use of liens intensified during the Depression.

The lack of options for independent business decision-making was not restricted to settlers who were under lien. Layfield Allan was only £61-12-7 in arrears by 1929 when he applied to his bank for an overdraft. Inspector Younger considered that ‘The lessee has been a real object lesson to settlers in this district’. However, he was still refused, as the bank did not want to have anything to do with the Board. Since many settlers in the area were in arrears to between £500 and £1,000, Allan was in a relatively sound position. In hindsight, the bank’s position was understandable. If the bank financed settlers and they

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63 PROV, VPRS 748, Box 6, A. J. Ball, Mocamboro Estate, lessee to C.S.B., 26.4.29.
64 *ibid.*, lessee to C.S.B, 26.4.29.
65 PROV, VPRS 748, Box 2, L. Allan, Hilgay Estate, lessee to the C.S.B., 17.8.29.
66 *ibid.*, Inspector Younger to C.S.B., 18.2.31.
failed, the chances of recouping the loan was slight with the C.S.B. holding a first mortgage.

*Residency Clauses and Settlers Living Off-Farm*

Inspectors had to ensure that settlers complied with residency provisions in the Soldier Settlement Act. These clauses were a continuation of the regulations of the Free Selection Acts of the nineteenth century when settlers were expected to reside on their blocks in an attempt to prevent absentee landlords and speculators.67 These provisions were usually taken seriously by the C.S.B. Any single settler (and initially these were in the majority) who was living off-farm or away working could be found in breach of the provisions of the Act and asked to explain why his lease should not be terminated.68

A letter from Inspector Blake to the C.S.B. in 1927 noted that, under the Soldier Settlement Act, settlers had to be in residence for eight months of year. If this was correct, it was ignored by the Board who wanted settlers to be permanently in residence on their blocks.69 The rigid enforcement of the Act made it hard for settlers who preferred to live off-farm or who may have been able to find casual work. Irrespective of the C.S.B.’s disapproval of off-farm work, it took every


68 See Lake, *op. cit.*, 1987, pp. 77-79 for additional comments on the Board’s attitude towards those settlers who were absent from their blocks.

69 PROV, VPRS 748, Box 85. R. G. Johnson, Elderslie Estate, Inspector Blake to C.S.B., 13.12.27.
opportunity to force settlers to reduce their arrears. A number of settlers in the area had been shearers before the war. This was a profitable occupation, which often involved staying away from the block for several weeks at a time. The income would be a valuable addition to the settler’s annual returns.

The C.S.B. was inconsistent in its treatment of soldier settlers deemed to be in breach of the rules. In 1922, W. McIntosh of Glenorchy Estate received an adverse report for not residing on his block. Until his house was ready, he had been living with Mr. G. McLean, another soldier settler with an adjoining block. Prior to moving in with McLean, McIntosh had lived in a tent. He should not have been blamed for residing with a neighbour during a Western District winter. It is suggested in the file that the inspector reported McIntosh to the C.S.B. for non-residence without conferring with him.

The treatment of W. McIntosh can be contrasted with R. G. Mitchell of Hilgay. Mitchell was seen as an ideal settler who was always up to date with his payments. He was also in breach of the residency clauses, but no action was taken. Mitchell’s father had land next door and father and son ran the two properties together. He continued to live with his father. Mitchell’s ability to

70 PROV, VPRS 748, Box 112. W. McIntosh. Glenorchy Estate. lessee to C.S.B., 9.8.22.
71 PROV, VPRS 748, Box 100, R. G. Mitchell, Hilgay Estate.
72 ibid., 9.2.23 and 21.2.28.
meet his instalments, probably influenced the C.S.B.'s decision to leave him alone.

Another inconsistency occurred with Harold Baxter, a Section 20 settler in the Casterton district. Baxter's parents owned property adjoining his block. As a single man Baxter preferred to live with his parents. He received several adverse reports for not fulfilling the residency clauses but Inspector Murphy asked for a dispensation on his behalf in 1931.73 At that time the road to his block was covered with between five and six feet of water and much of the land was likely to be inundated during the winter months. The lessee was planning on marriage and did not wish his bride to be so isolated. The dispensation was denied as it was felt that Baxter had known the area and the conditions before taking up the lease.74 This negative response was more likely to be received by Section 20 settlers as they chose their own block and then asked the C.S.B. to purchase it on their behalf.

Concessions For Those Who Could Prove They Needed Them

Inspectors also had to ensure that settlers were not exploiting the system in order to gain concessions. The numerous changes in the regulations governing soldier settlement had an unfortunate side-effect in that, more economically viable,

74 ibid., C.S.B. to lessee, 7.7.31.
settlers responded by curtailing payments to the Board. The problem for the more efficient settlers was that those who made no effort to meet their commitments were placed in the same position as hard workers who, because of adverse circumstances were also in arrears. This frustrated settlers like George Black of Nangeela who reported that the estimated fall of £300 in his income during 1931 would mean that he would be unable to meet his commitments to the Board. He wrote to the C.S.B. that ‘I’ve always tried to pay my way and be fair to the Board and if all settlers had done this, things would have been much better today’. Subsequent events proved that being in arrears was the right course to follow as those who were up to date with their instalments failed to benefit from concessions. H. A. Hill realised this and wrote to the C.S.B.:

I refrained from applying to the Advisory Board for relief simply because I wanted to shoulder my responsibilities in full if I possibly could, but now I see my mistake and know that on a dairying block it is futile to hope to make up lost ground.

The practice of only giving concessions to settlers perceived to be the most deserving led a number to try to make a case for assistance. As the situation worsened, inspectors suspected that settlers who were capable of paying their

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75 See Appendix Four: Relevant Acts of Parliament and Appendix Five: Concessions granted to Soldier Settlers.
76 PROV, VPRS 748, Box 12, G. C. Black, Nangeela Estate, lessee to C.S.B., 7.3.31.
77 ibid.
78 PROV, VPRS 748, Box 74, H. A Hill, Hilgay Estate, lessee to C.S.B., 19.1.27.
instalments were pleading poverty.\textsuperscript{79} If this was true it was hard on settlers who placed themselves in financial difficulty in order to pay the C.S.B. and then saw others avoiding payments and gaining further assistance.\textsuperscript{80} Frederick Miller of Struan was described as a good farmer but his arrears still increased during the late 1920s. Inspector Younger felt that Miller might have been deliberately avoiding his obligations:

> Until a little over two years ago this settler kept up his payments, since then he has paid nothing and will not answer correspondence. During the time that he has not paid the Board, arrears of £329 have developed, but all outside commitments have been met. He is continually referred to as a good farmer, which fact is no doubt reflected in the returns that he should have available to meet his obligations. It is evident that he will not pay the C.S.B. and has had land rent free for the past two years. It is possible that he has money saved as everything points to him being thrifty and capable.\textsuperscript{81}

Conditions were deteriorating and Miller may have been genuinely unable to pay as six months later Inspector Younger reported that the ‘lessee is losing heart and does not consider he can make a success’.\textsuperscript{82} It may have been that the formerly ‘successful’ soldier settler was ashamed of being in financial difficulties and had paid his local accounts to maintain his local status.

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{79} PROV, VPRS 748, Box 99, F. Miller, Struan Estate, Inspector to C.S.B., 9.12.31.
\end{flushleft}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{80} PROV, VPRS 748, Box 97, P. Martinich, Elderslie Estate, Inspector Murphy to C.S.B., 29.1.31.
\end{flushleft}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{81} PROV, VPRS 748, Box 99, F. Miller, Struan Estate, Inspector to C.S.B., 9.12.31.
\end{flushleft}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{82} \textit{ibid.}, Inspector Younger to C.S.B., 12.5.32.
\end{flushleft}
The C.S.B.’s Perception of Settlers

In 1927, H. A. Hill wrote to the C.S.B. seeking any possible assistance and detailing his workload. Like a number of other settlers, he had lost faith in the Board:

I do not expect you to take my word for the forgoing although what I have written herein is true and on the square; but no doubt Inspector Younger will bear me out on these things.83

Layfield Allan of Hilgay instructed his wool broker to send all the proceeds to the C.S.B., noting that ‘I am trying to do without the money so you had better deduct it from my sheep account’.84 These attitudes were common, and suggest that numerous settlers realised that they could not make any money. By the end of the 1920s they only wanted to survive and, preferably, be left alone by the C.S.B.

The evidence makes it possible to ascertain what some inspectors thought of the settlers in their districts, but the position of the C.S.B. itself is less clear with regard to individual settlers. Beyond their suspicions of the reasons behind the soldier settlers’ failure to meet their commitments there is little concrete evidence as to what the members of the C.S.B. thought of the settlers in the Hamilton district. They made constant demands for payment in letters to settlers and their inspectors. Behind the tough rhetoric, there was often a reluctance to force settlers to vacate their blocks. Frequently demands for them to transfer their holdings

83 PROV, VPRS 748, Box 74, H. A Hill, Hilgay Estate, lessee to C.S.B., 19.1.27.
84 PROV, VPRS 748, Box 2, L. Allan, Hilgay Estate, lessee to C.S.B., 7.3.29.
were not followed up and threats of eviction lapsed. Even when the settler seemed to be in a hopeless situation the final step was often avoided. One possible contributing factor was that the Board was able to take an overall view of soldier settlement from a state-wide perspective. The Hamilton settlers were in a relatively sound position compared to those in the Mallee or Gippsland. In addition, the economic returns from farming became so poor in the early 1930s that it became almost impossible to find a purchaser for farm land. It was probably easier to leave settlers in residence than force them to leave and try to find a purchaser. (The situation was different when the C.S.B. wanted the block to allocate to other settlers.) Finally, settlers who were required to sell tended to appeal to their local Members of Parliament and the decision was often reversed. This political involvement was unpopular with the C.S.B. and was later used as a reason for its replacement by the C.S.C.85

The C.S.B. was particularly suspicious of soldier settlers who possessed livestock purchased with Board finance. It went to a lot of trouble to keep track of settlers’ stock numbers in the hope of catching settlers disposing of stock privately. Sometimes the Board’s lack of farming knowledge led to foolish mistakes. In 1931, it wrote to Inspector Hamill detailing discrepancies in the number of sheep

on L. V. Donehue’s block. The C.S.B. concluded from the figures in the file that there had only been an increase of eighty-seven sheep in six years. The Board felt that the 180 lambs he bred in this time should have had lambs themselves, as there was no record of them being sold. Inspector Hamill replied to the C.S.B. pointing out that with 180 lambs being born it was likely that approximately ninety of these would be male and thus physically incapable of reproducing. It is understandable that settlers developed poor opinions of the Board when questions like this were asked. Settlers did sell livestock privately to pay the store account or make other purchases outside the narrow range deemed necessary by the C.S.B. As was detailed in chapter seven, the level of stock mortality was also high and lambing percentages were low.

The C.S.B. and later the C.S.C. did not always agree with settlers about what work had been carried out on the block. In 1934, J. F. Dix of Greenhills estate received a letter from the C.S.C. asserting that he had carried out no pasture improvement since taking up the block.

I have to advise you that although you have been in possession of your holding for over 14 years, the position as regards your pastures is the same as when you started. No attempt has been made to increase your carrying capacity by sowing

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86 PROV, VPRS 748, Box 44, L. V. Donehue, Chrome Estate, C.S.B. to Inspector Hamill, 2.6.31.
87 ibid., Inspector Hamill to C.S.B., 3.7.1931.
88 Interview with Mrs E. McBain. (Widow of Peter McBain, settler on Elderslie Estate.)
down sub clover or any suitable feed grass and your position is gradually
becoming worse.\textsuperscript{89}

Dix replied, pointing out that he only had 309 acres and that he had broken up and
top dressed 180 acres of his farm and ‘I top dressed approximately 40 acres last
season’. Dix noted that he had sown fifteen acres to sub clover but the returns
discouraged him from continuing with pasture renovations.\textsuperscript{90} There is no evidence
as to the source of the Board’s information. The ‘pink’ form reports usually
contained details of pasture improvements. If the work had been carried out the
local inspector would have known about it and should have informed the C.S.B.
accordingly.

On the evidence in the Advances Files, a number of inspectors advised settlers to
carry out work that was unlikely to be successful and could have led to the loss of
the block.\textsuperscript{91} Inspectors and settlers had ample evidence as to the condition of
individual blocks. When a block was unsuited to an enterprise that had failed in
the past, why continue to recommend it? There is no satisfactory answer unless
inspectors were adopting a specific agenda on their own or, more probably, the
C.S.B.’s behalf.

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\textsuperscript{89} PROV, VPRS 748, Box 43. J. F. Dix, Greenhills estate, C.S.C. to lessee, 17.7.34.

\textsuperscript{90} ibid., lessee to C.S.C, 28.7.34.

\textsuperscript{91} See chapter eight and nine for a further discussion of inappropriate advice.
Milk and wheat were both commodities that settlers were advised to produce where there was little evidence of the suitability of the soil or of the potential profitability of the enterprise. The problems associated with dairying on under-developed blocks were discussed in chapter nine. During the 1920s, the price of wheat remained high enough for the C.S.B. to feel that it was a good option for soldier settlers in the region. The Scullin Government’s ‘Grow More Wheat’ campaign also encouraged wheat growing during the late 1920s. The Board did not accept that some estates were too wet for cropping. As the prices of other agricultural commodities dropped it was hard for settlers to justify the expense, especially when crops regularly failed. Unlike wool growing, where sheep continue to grow wool, even of poorer quality, during droughts and wet years, a poor season could result in the total loss of the crop.

_Inquiry Boards_

In addition to the inspectors and supervisors, for a short period in the 1920s, there were also Inquiry Boards assessing the settlers. The Boards were established in a belated response to the Royal Commission on Soldier Settlement 1925. The

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92 See Appendix Seven: Commodity Prices.
93 In an attempt to halt the balance of payments decline wheat growers were exhorted to grow more wheat and were guaranteed a price of 4/- per bushel by the Commonwealth Government. Unfortunately for the wheat growers, a hostile Senate refused to pass a bill authorising the Government to pay the growers. See Dingle. _op. cit._, 1984, pp. 190-192.
94 See chapter eight for a discussion of the costs involved.
95 See Appendix Six for a summary of the recommendations of the Royal Commission.
Royal Commission was, like others before and since, set up for political purposes by the Nationalist/Country Party Coalition Government, which defeated Labor in November 1924.\textsuperscript{96} Appointed on the 21st January 1925, the Commissioners\textsuperscript{97} travelled around the State, assessing the problems with soldier settlement and listening to settlers.\textsuperscript{98}

Initially, the government ignored the report which was also poorly received by settlers\textsuperscript{99}, but the hearings provided a public forum at which they could air their grievances and helped to publicise their plight. In 1927, with another election pending, the Nationalist/Country Party Coalition Government re-examined the report of the Royal Commission. In response to the recommendations and calls by the RSL, nine Inquiry Boards were appointed on the 12th of April 1927.\textsuperscript{100}

Each board consisted of a soldier settler appointed by the settlers in the district, an officer of the C.S.B. and an independent chairman selected by the other two

\textsuperscript{96} Lomas, \textit{op. cit.}, 1979, p. 588.

\textsuperscript{97} Harry Wiltshire was the only soldier settler member of the Royal Commission.

\textsuperscript{98} Royal Commission on Soldier Settlement, \textit{op. cit.}, 1925.

\textsuperscript{99} Lomas has described the report of the Royal Commission as a ‘bland, unanalytical, even hypocritical account’. Lomas, \textit{op. cit.}, 1979, p. 588. Settlers who felt that the report was aimed at minimising electoral damage to the government, ultimately had their revenge by helping to vote it out and replacing it in November 1927 with the Hogan Labor government. However, this was a pyrrhic victory as the settlers' situation was little better under Labor.

\textsuperscript{100} See Appendix six: Outline of the Inquiries and the Royal Commission for more information.
members. The questions referred to the Boards are detailed in Table 10.2. Settlers who were in difficulties and who wanted to have their general position reviewed could apply to have their case heard by one of the Boards. These Inquiry Boards dealt with 3,542 cases throughout Victoria.

 Appearing before an Inquiry Board was an uncertain move, as it did not always make recommendations that were favourable to the settler. H. McCabe of Greenhills was one settler who received an adverse finding. The Board recommended that he be sold up, as the C.S.B. wanted the block to strengthen adjoining settlers’ holdings. McCabe was described as a poor manager who was overstocked, with heavy outside debts. He appealed and the finding was rescinded. McCabe promised to make every effort to pay off his debts. A further £250 was written off his arrears of interest under Section 15 and he was granted additional land. However, he had to pay £300 by the end of April or the lease would be cancelled. McCabe was able to comply and finally made his block freehold in 1950. The Inquiry Board had completely reversed its earlier decision.

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102 ibid.

103 PROV, VPRS 748, Box 105, H. McCabe, Greenhills Estate, Report of Inquiry Board, 19.8.27.


105 PROV, VPRS 5714. Box 588, H. McCabe, Greenhills Estate, Revaluation File, 15.2.50.
The files do not indicate if McCabe made a greater effort to meet his commitments after the adverse finding or if the C.S.B. had seen him as a convenient sacrifice to enable them to build up adjoining holdings. It is possible that he was in a similarly marginal position to many other settlers but was unfortunate enough to have a block the Board wanted. The file does not mention where he found the £300. McCabe may have gone further into debt to a bank or stock firm or he may have had money put aside. The latter is unlikely as the C.S.B. kept a close watch on settlers’ finances.

A particularly damning case, from the Geelong administrative district, was detailed in the Legislative Assembly during 1928 when Mr A. Hughes, the Member for Hampden, tabled a report of an investigation of an Inquiry Board. The Board described the unnamed settler as follows:

We visited and inspected the area on the 7th September 1927. In our opinion this is a very heavy man, who seems to have very little management ability. After a careful inspection of his block we are of the opinion that same is not a very suitable one for dairying. We also consider that the area desires building up.\footnote{Mr A. Hughes, MLA, \textit{VPD}, vol. 176, 1928, p. 190.}

The report of the Inquiry Board was contradictory to say the least. The questions asked and answers received are contained in Table 10.2:
Table 10. 2. Questions asked to settler under investigation by Inquiry Board and
the Board’s conclusions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What adverse circumstances (if any) prevent, or will prevent, the settler</td>
<td>None.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>from making a success of his holding?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has the settler cultivated and worked his land to the best advantage?</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has the settler kept his land reasonably free from bracken, noxious</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>weeds or vermin?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is the settler sufficiently experienced and physically capable of working</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>his land to the best advantage?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has the settler, in the special circumstances of his case, paid a</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reasonable amount of the instalments due and payable to the State?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The Board’s recommendations were not supported by their own evidence:

1. Board recommends cancelling the lease.

2. Block should be revalued.

3. Block should be reclassified as a grazing area.

The soldier settler was threatened with eviction because his block was too small,
because it had been originally valued too highly and because (under guidance) he
had been carrying out the wrong form of farming. While the Board reported that
the settler had ‘very little management ability’, its own conclusions (noted in
Table 10.2) suggest that he had ‘worked his land to the best advantage’ and ‘paid
a reasonable amount of the instalments’. There seems to have been little else the
settler could have done in light of the physical constraints on his progress and the
economic conditions of the time. As Mr A. Hughes pointed out
The most serious aspect of the case is that the Board recommended the cancellation of the lease first and afterwards considered the other questions of revaluation and reclassification of the land.107

This was not an isolated incident and other settlers also received findings, inconsistent with the evidence presented to the Board. V. J. Ball of Glenorchy also approached the Inquiry Board because he considered his block overpriced and not a living area.108 The Board was unsympathetic as

He can milk 10 cows and carry 200 lambing ewes. This we consider the ideal situation for a soldier settler. He should make £150 out of the cows and £50 out of pigs which together should meet his living expenses. Out of the 200 ewes, he should make a return sufficient to meet his instalments to the Board and pay working expenses on the farm.109

The Inquiry Board was optimistic about his returns from his ten cows. Using Davidson’s figures110, his ten cows should have produced approximately 1,500 pounds of butter fat per year. Table 9.6 shows that the price of butter fat in 1927 was sixteen pence per pound. This gives a gross return of £100, not £150. Ball reported that his sheep had a disease of the mouth resulting in a loss of approximately seven shillings per head on 150 lambs owing to their very stunted growth and that the sheep had cut three pounds less wool than in the previous

107 ibid., pp. 190-191.
108 PROV, VPRS 748, Box 6, V. J. Ball, Glenorchy Estate, Inquiry Board, 4.7.27.
109 ibid.
year.\textsuperscript{111} Therefore, it is likely that his grown sheep would also have produced less wool than anticipated.

Not happy with his assessment, Ball asked to have his case reheard.\textsuperscript{112} He had lost 100 sheep through disease and cold weather at shearing time since the Board sat locally. It was a futile move, as his appeal was rejected. Ball did not go into any details of the disease suffered by his sheep. Historically losses, due to inclement weather at shearing time, are always possible in the Western District.

L. E. Glare had more luck with the Inquiry Board.\textsuperscript{113} It recommended that his small, wet, block should be revalued and that, if practicable, his allotment be built up to a grazing area. Land was available, and Glare was allocated an extra 432 acres to add to his original 244 acres. To build Glare’s block up by nearly double the original acreage was an admission that it had been grossly inadequate.

C. M. H. Kilburn of Warrong, one of many other settlers with wet blocks, also applied to have his case heard by the Inquiry Board.\textsuperscript{114} He had previously had £250 written off under ‘adverse circumstances’ and £82 written off the cost of his

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{111} PROV, VPRS 748, Box 6, V. J. Ball, Glenorchy Estate, lessee to C.S.B., 26-1-27.
\textsuperscript{112} \textit{ibid.}, Inquiry Board, 11.11.27.
\textsuperscript{113} PROV, VPRS 748, Box 61, L. E. Glare, Warrong Estate, Report of Inquiry Board, 13.9.27.
\textsuperscript{114} PROV, VPRS 748, Box 88, C. M. H. Kilburn, Warrong Estate.
\end{flushright}
house. The Inquiry Board gave him a better hearing than McCabe but refused his application to have the block revalued. They recommended that a further £200 be written off under Section 15 and that he receive advances for ten tons of superphosphate and 300 pounds of sub clover seed. However, they recommended that in future Kilburn should finance himself, which would have been difficult as the first mortgage was held by the C.S.B. and, as noted above, private financial institutions were increasingly reluctant to do business with soldier settlers. The decline in the value of land during the 1920s meant that there would be little left for other debtors in the event of failure.

Irrespective of the views of the soldier settlers about their treatment by the Inquiry Boards, politicians and press felt that the wrong settlers were being assisted:

People who did work on their properties were often discriminated against by Advisory Boards with ‘slackers’ getting sums written off the value of their land through ‘adverse circumstances.’

Other soldier settlers concurred so it is reasonable to assume that undeserving settlers did receive concessions. The issue of undeserved concessions will be addressed in greater detail in chapter eleven but the possibility that settlers may

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115 ibid., C.S.B. to lessee, 24.9.27.
116 ibid., Report of Inquiry Board, 15.7.27.
117 Mr. McDonald, MLA. (Polwarth) VPD. vol. 176. 1928. p. 595.
have believed, and been discouraged by, the continuing anti-soldier settler propaganda should not be discounted.

Inspectors were involved with the deliberations of the Inquiry Boards and their perceptions of settlers had a considerable bearing on the assessment. Settlers perceived by the C.S.B. to be troublemakers were especially at risk of eviction. It is probable that the C.S.B. wanted Wally Douglas of Elderslie off his block. Douglas was president of his local sub-branch of the RSL and outspoken in his criticism of the administration. In October 1927, an Inquiry Board recommended that his ‘total liabilities [were] such that he cannot possibly succeed and clear himself’.\(^{118}\) The Board recommended that he be given until early 1928 to satisfactorily transfer his property or his lease would be cancelled. Douglas applied to have his case reheard and was granted a reprieve. Inspector Blake opposed the decision. He considered that to be £1,800 in arrears to the C.S.B., when Douglas had started with £1,500 cash, would ‘take a lot of explaining’ and that ‘His influence on the settlement is not a desirable factor and one the settlement will be better without’.\(^{119}\) The only assets listed in his Qualification Certificate documentation were a Gratuity Bond of £113 and £130 cash. The alleged £1,500 was not listed. It is impossible to prove if Blake was making a

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\(^{118}\) PROV, VPRS 748, Box 45, W. Douglas, Elderslie Estate, Report of Inquiry Board, 11.10.27.

\(^{119}\) \textit{ibid.}, Inspector Blake to C.S.B., 16.1.28.
deliberate attempt to remove a perceived troublemaker or whether the assets listed in the documentation were inaccurate. While there is some doubt about Wally Douglas’ farming ability⁹⁰ there is no doubt about his tenacity as a fighter on his own and his fellow settlers’ behalf.¹²¹ To be £1,800 in arrears was high but the stock losses suffered by the settlers on Elderslie were also high.¹²² Douglas’ continual approaches to politicians and letters to newspapers made him a nuisance to the C.S.B. Often only the ability of the settler to argue his case, to enlist the support of his local politician or that of the local RSL sub-branch, saved him from eviction. Douglas understood the system and protested on both his own and his fellow settlers’ behalf.

The inconsistent assessments of the Inquiry Boards made the decision to appear before one, difficult. However, if a settler did attend and was dissatisfied with the recommendations, he could usually appeal and have the decision reversed. The practice of successfully appealing adverse findings was common throughout the life of the soldier settlement scheme. This became increasingly frustrating for the

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¹²⁰ Conversation with Max Neale (Langkoop) who was a neighbour of Wally Douglas for many years.

¹²¹ The Douglas papers contain a number of letters which he wrote to the RSL and members of Parliament on behalf of local settlers.

¹²² See chapter seven.
C.S.B. and led to its calls for changes in the administration of soldier settlement.\textsuperscript{123}

\textit{Conclusion}

This chapter has examined the interaction between the administration and settlers in the years leading up to the Depression. Inspectors were appointed to ensure that settlers fulfilled their part in the successful management of their blocks. A significant percentage of soldier settlers were inexperienced and needed to be advised on the best methods of farming and farm management. While some of the advice inspectors provided to soldier settlers was unrealistic, they did not reduce settlers in the Hamilton district to the level of ‘slaves’ as previously suggested.\textsuperscript{124}

One problem in assessing the contribution of inspectors to the success or failure of soldier settlers in the region is that it is difficult to assess their autonomy. Were they instructed to force settlers to carry out unsuitable farming practices or sell breeding stock to reduce their arrears? There is not enough evidence regarding the source of their reasoning. It seems reasonable to conclude that they were responding to the perceived wishes of the C.S.B., even if these were not directives. Inspectors were only human. Some made mistakes and the settlers under their care suffered accordingly, but overall they provided necessary

\textsuperscript{123} Annual Report of the Closer Settlement Board for the year ended 30\textsuperscript{th}  June 1931, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 5.

\textsuperscript{124} Lake, \textit{op. cit.}, 1987, p. 77.
guidance. They had a difficult and frustrating job to perform on behalf of the
C.S.B. and were likely to be blamed if the settler failed to meet his commitments.
The plight of soldier settlers during the Great Depression will be examined in
chapter eleven.
SECTION FOUR: THE REWARD GETS REASSESSED

The Commission feels that 90 per cent of settlers will succeed under normal conditions and sound administration and that the great majority appreciate the position in which they have been placed and now face the future with confidence.

Chapter Eleven

The Great Depression. Efficiency will Save the Day - Triers Have to Go

the touching belief in the efficacy of increased production at any cost,
irrespective of market, is a major factor in our present economic difficulties.

L. F. Giblin. 1929.¹

Introduction

While a mythology has evolved about the heroic status of the men of the First A.I.F., this status meant nothing to the Closer Settlement Board, or those who criticised soldier settlers. Evidence in the Advances files suggests that the C.S.B. had almost given up on a significant number of soldier settlers, seeing them as failures. Those settlers who had struggled and denied their families just to meet their commitments received no thanks from the Board and were becoming increasingly cynical about the scheme. By the end of the 1920s, they were looking at a scheme that was very different to that envisaged when they were interviewed for their Qualification Certificates. The Great Depression was a harsh time for soldier settlers, especially coming after their previous travails. However, the Depression should be treated, not as a catastrophic event in its own right but as part of a steadily worsening physical and economic situation.

The heroic nature of the men can be seen when they persevered on their blocks, contending with increasing indebtedness, at a time when there appeared to be no

rational reason for continuing. By any economic criteria, the farms were unviable, and they had no apparent hope of survival. So the question must be asked: why did they persevere? The answer is probably that they had nothing to lose.

Conditions were generally bad, there was no work available, and as soldier settlers, they had somewhere to live and could provide themselves with basic foodstuffs. This chapter analyses the deteriorating economic conditions during the Depression and the effect of these on the settlers. In addition, their declining relationship with the C.S.B. and the changing community perceptions towards soldier settlement will be examined.

At the onset of the Depression, the C.S.B. was administering a scheme that was losing money at an alarming rate.\(^2\) Mr Justice Pike estimated that by 1929, the total loss sustained by Victoria was £7,721,891.\(^3\) Alternatively, £834 had been lost per Victorian settler. These official losses were only one part of the problem. There were also the unofficial losses. Local storekeepers and other merchants also lost heavily. The C.S.B. had first charge over settlers’ assets and the majority had no equity in their blocks. Therefore, if the settler failed, there would be little or nothing for outside debtors. The losses of the local storekeepers were unlikely to ever be repaid, and this would make them vulnerable to failure with the onset of the Depression.

\(^2\) Pike, \textit{op. cit.}, 1929, p. 6.

\(^3\) \textit{ibid.}, p. 5.
Mr Justice Pike identified local store debts as one of the most pressing problems faced by soldier settlers at the onset of the Depression. Settlers were dependent on their local storekeeper for survival and the latter's patience was running out:

A large number of these holders with shortage of area have been carried by the local storekeeper, but owing to the State authorities having first call on their securities of any asset of a realisable value, the position has been practically reached that the storekeepers had decided that they could not carry the load any longer, and had given notice to a very large number of settlers that in future their store accounts would have to be closed down.4

This had the potential to be disastrous. If settlers could no longer obtain credit, and the C.S.B. would not advance them enough to live on, they would have no option but to give up, sell commodities privately or starve.

The reaction of the C.S.B. was to apply increased pressure on settlers for payment and, if unsuccessful, attempt to persuade them to transfer their holdings to other farmers. Irrespective of their financial situation, the majority of settlers refused. David Crabtree, like many other settlers, understood the futility of leaving while economic conditions remained depressed. He wrote to the C.S.B. in 1930 reflecting that ‘one wonders what is going to be the finish. You put one off and another on and in a few years the new one will be as bad off’.5 The physical situation was also poor with over 4,400 of Victoria’s approximately 11,277 settlers having left their blocks. (See Table 11.1.)

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4 ibid., p. 24.
5 PROV, VPRS 748, Box 77, D. J. Crabtree, Elderslie Estate, lessee to C.S.B., 18.8.30.
Table 11.1. Number of Victorian settlers remaining to the 30th June, 1929

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of settlers under Conditional Purchase Lease and Selection Purchase Lease</td>
<td>10,509</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharefarmers and holders of Leasing Agreements and Private lands</td>
<td>768</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of soldier settlers</td>
<td>11,277</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of abandoned and cancelled cases</td>
<td>3,023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of transferred or surrendered cases</td>
<td>1,458</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of settlers to leave their blocks</td>
<td>4,481</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of settlers on blocks at 30th June 1929</td>
<td>6,796</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


It is a pity that the C.S.B. did not differentiate between those settlers who had ‘abandoned and cancelled’ or ‘transferred and surrendered’ their blocks on a per estate basis. This would have enabled a more complete analysis of the failure rate. However, it would make little difference to the settler concerned, if he was forced to abandon or surrender his block. The end result was the same. As failed settlers disappear from the records of the C.S.B., usually after their debts had been written off as irrecoverable, their final fate is unknown. Failed settlers were like the local storekeepers in that their personal losses cannot be quantified. An increasing number of settlers were in a critical financial position.

The Position of Australia’s Rural Exports and the Response

The rural sector had traditionally been dependent on exports for much of its income which made it vulnerable to any international economic downturn. Rural commodity prices had been declining since the mid-1920s, well before the Wall
Street crash of 1929 which heralded the start of the Depression (Table 11.2).

Wheat and wool had fallen more than fifty per cent from the mid-1920s to 1931. The further decline during the Depression meant that settlers had difficulty budgeting, let alone meeting promises made to the C.S.B. The commodity price decline is summarised below:

Table 11.2. The fall in rural commodity prices in 1932-33, compared with the average of the years 1924-25 to 1928-29

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Commodity Group</th>
<th>Percentage Decline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agricultural</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pastoral</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dairying</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Farm Production</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Australia’s export income declined from £139 million in 1929 to £99 million in 1930. The Scullin Labor Government hoped to reverse the decline in export income by encouraging farmers to ‘Grow More Wheat’ and guaranteeing growers four shillings a bushel. It has been noted in chapter six that in 1920 there had been attempts to persuade Victoria’s farmers to increase production in order to reduce Australia’s war debt. Similarly, in 1930 the *Journal of the Department of*

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8 In this context ‘agricultural’ includes crops and horticultural.
10 *ibid.*, p. 255.
Agriculture of Victoria published a special ‘Grow More Wheat’ issue\(^\text{11}\) including an article by Sir John Monash who used his past position as Commander-in-Chief of the 1\(^{st}\) A.I.F. to appeal to returned men:

> The appeal in the first connection is to the man on the land and I have not the slightest fear of the response. No sector of the community gave more freely of its manhood during the war than our primary producers and despite this serious drain, its members’ production was maintained at its highest level - more in fact. ... The same spirit is required today and I heartily associate myself with the appeal of the Hon. the Premier for the greatest possible acreage under wheat and the most intense effort to make every acre yield its maximum. To old comrades now on the land, I make a special and confident appeal. I know their difficulties and how impossible it is for many to increase their acreage. But I do know that they will do their best by intense effort and cultivation to make every acre they are able to sow give its greatest yield.\(^\text{12}\)

Sir John Monash’s exhortation was a reminder to returned soldiers among the farmers of Victoria of their wartime response to the ‘call to arms’. Even farmers who had stayed at home would have been familiar with appeals to their patriotism.

The whole issue contained similar appeals to ‘Grow More Wheat’ including one from Sir Robert Gibson, Chairman of the Board of the Commonwealth Bank. His participation seems ironic when the Commonwealth Bank Board later refused to allow the Scullin Labour Government to pay for the wheat.\(^\text{13}\) The tenure of the


\(^{12}\) ‘A call to duty’, *ibid.*, p. 143.

\(^{13}\) Macintyre, *op. cit.*, 1986, pp. 255 - 256.
issue illustrates the government’s naïve view of agricultural markets. As in 1920, farmers, including soldier settlers, who took the Commonwealth government's advice to grow more wheat lost heavily.\textsuperscript{14}

The majority of settlers in the Hamilton administrative district were heavily in arrears in their instalments to the Closer Settlement Board.\textsuperscript{15} During the Depression they were unable to stop these increasing. Dave Pahl was a typical settler. In response to pressure from his inspector, he offered the C.S.B. the whole of his wool clip towards meeting his arrears of £1,978-18-2.\textsuperscript{16} Pahl estimated that his wool was worth £200 but there is a pencilled note in his file in which the [unnamed] writer considered that the wool would make ‘probably £170’.\textsuperscript{17} Even this was grossly optimistic as the wool only returned £100-9-0.\textsuperscript{18} With only a small amount from cropping, plus the wool, Pahl had no hope of meeting his annual instalments of over £300, let alone reducing his arrears.\textsuperscript{19} He also had to find his living and working expenses for the year. Unless commodity prices improved sharply, or his instalments were substantially reduced, Pahl’s chances

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\item \textsuperscript{14} Oman, \textit{op. cit.}, 1920, p. 193.
\item \textsuperscript{15} The only settler in the Hamilton Region identified as not in arrears by 1930 was R. G. Mitchell of Hilgay Estate. He ran his block in conjunction with his father who had an adjoining property. For this reason he could not be described as a typical soldier settler. PROV, VPRS 748, Box 100.
\item \textsuperscript{16} PROV, VPRS 748, Box 122, D. M. Pahl, Elderslie Estate, lessee to C.S.B., 7.1.30.
\item \textsuperscript{17} PROV, VPRS 748, Box 122, Inspector to C.S.B., 28.12.29.
\item \textsuperscript{18} PROV, VPRS 748, Box 12, Wool returns. 14.2.30.
\item \textsuperscript{19} PROV, VPRS 748, Box 122, Statement of Account from C.S.B., 7.1.30.
\end{thebibliography}
of survival were not good. From 1932, the Closer Settlement Commission would help by reducing instalments to more realistic levels.

Another settler in a critical position was D. M. Cameron, a Section 20 settler from near Harrow. He was also in arrears and worried about his future prospects as ‘My wool cheque this year is half what it was last year and it has got me thinking how I am going to carry on and pay my way’.20

In the following year, Cameron's situation declined even further:

I regret having to agree with you that my account has a tendency to drift - the problem is how to stop it. I would be grateful if you would advise me how to make any money. Wool is not payable, dairying is as bad and eggs have gone to the bow wows! There was a little money in rabbit skins but they are now hopeless.21

The C.S.B. had no suggestions. Both these settlers had been unable to meet their commitments prior to the Depression.

David Crabtree also wrote to the C.S.B. to explain why he was unable to meet his commitments:

I wish to state for the Board’s benefit that it is no fault of mine. I expect I am only wasting my time writing to explain, for it is known by all the settlers that the Board only takes notice of what suits them.22

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20 PROV, VPRS 748, Box 25, D. M. Cameron, Section 20, lessee to C.S.B., 17.1.31.
21 PROV, VPRS 748, Box 25, lessee to C.S.B., 5.2.32.
22 PROV, VPRS 748, Box 77, D. L. Crabtree, Elderslie Estate, lessee to C.S.B., 18.8.30.
Settlers in similar situations had no hope of meeting their commitments as the whole rural economy was contracting. Farmers with stock to sell had difficulty finding buyers for their livestock. In April 1930, Inspector Bowman attended a special sheep sale at Minhamite where 28,000 sheep were on sale. Only 500 were sold. While some sheep could have been in poor condition or diseased, it is unlikely that 27,500 were unsaleable. Farmers were reluctant to spend either their own, or borrowed, money on sheep when the future was so uncertain.

The press occasionally used stories of successful soldier settlers to show, by contrast, what they perceived to be the problems with soldier settlement. One unnamed farmer from Coleraine was quoted in The Age as having returns of over £945 from less than 120 acres. He was reported to be milking over thirty cows, devoting ‘a lot of attention to lamb and pig raising and feeding 450 fowls’. A search of a substantial selection of Advances files for the Hamilton district has revealed no farmer with anything like these figures. A brief analysis suggests that he was unlikely to exist. Davidson has worked out the gross margins for an average dairy farmer in 1925-26 who was milking thirty cows on 180 acres, in which he estimates gross revenue of £379. The price of butterfat was

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23 PROV, VPRS 748, Box 89, P. King, Warrong Estate, Inspector Bowman to C.S.B., 8.4.30.


25 Davidson, op. cit., 1981, p. 291. Davidson does not do the same analysis for 1930 but the returns were similar.
approximately 15.75 pence per pound in 1925-26 and the same in 1929-30. With a theoretically similar income for the two years and the costs unlikely to be substantially different, the gross return of £945 seems impossibly high.

The figures for the stocking rate are also dubious. One lactating dairy cow is the equivalent of twenty-two to twenty-five dry sheep equivalents (DSEs). The above settler was quoted as milking thirty cows which, at twenty-five DSEs per cow, equals six and a quarter DSEs per acre. This was an era when very few soldier settlers were running more than two DSEs per acre. The settler was also, supposedly, running pigs and lambs. Pigs would live on skim milk but ewes and lambs require pasture. In addition, the fowls ate grain, which would, presumably, be grown on the block, thus further lowering the acreage available for dairy cows. The only possibility was that he was running the block in conjunction with other privately held land and these returns were included. In that case, any comparison with ordinary soldier settlers, who did not have the luxury of additional property, was invalid.

The unnamed settler could have been one of a minority of settlers who had families living nearby on established properties and whose profitability was higher. They had access to an established infrastructure, decreased development costs and additional feed for their livestock. However, when figures like those from the unnamed settler from Coleraine were published, soldier settlers lost even

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26 *ibid.*, p. 266.
more sympathy in the general community. They became a convenient target for a nation sliding deeper into debt and economic depression.

Settlers Advised to Transfer Their Blocks
At the onset of the Depression, settlers in the Hamilton area were still being advised to transfer their blocks. Many of these, including Dave Pahl, felt that the scheme was unsound from the beginning and saw no point in transferring. He believed that, if he did so, the C.S.B. would write off the arrears and reallocate the block at the original price plus the value of the improvements. Pahl wrote to the C.S.B. considering that, ‘as the settler, I am deserving of some consideration for the labour and improvements I have put into the block for the past eight years’.

Settlers felt that if the arrears could be written off for a purchaser, then existing settlers should be entitled to the concession. In 1930, the C.S.B. attempted to persuade Pahl to leave by offering to let him keep all of his wheat proceeds if he submitted an application to transfer the block within three months. He declined their offer. Retaining the wheat returns was not a great concession as will be seen from an analysis of his crop returns later in this chapter.

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28 ibid., lessee to C.S.B., 8.7.30.
29 ibid., C.S.B to lessee, 5.3.30.
Other settlers continued in the hope of greater concessions in the future.\textsuperscript{30}

Farmers did not always make rational financial decisions during the Depression.\textsuperscript{31}

For much of the 1930s costs of rural production outstripped returns. Why then did farmers continue to grow wheat or breed livestock? Was it a flaw in the rural character, a feeling that conditions must improve, a deep attachment to the land or a belief that farmers were the ‘backbone of the country’?\textsuperscript{32} The continuation of uneconomic farming practices was not unique to the Depression period and illustrates the, still common, perception among farmers that farming is a ‘way of life’, not an economic business. In the twenty first century, there are still cases of farmers producing commodities for which the returns are below the costs of production.

A substantial number of soldier settlers in the early 1930s were determined to continue irrespective of the Board's efforts to persuade them to transfer. Non-economic factors influenced these settlers’ propensity to persevere although they had no hope of success in the foreseeable future. They had worked hard for the previous decade, had married, seen their children born, and the block was home. Wally Douglas wrote to the Board that ‘I have put the best years of my life into

\textsuperscript{30} Giblin, \textit{op. cit.}, 1935, p. 47.

\textsuperscript{31} K. O. Campbell, ‘Australian agricultural production during the Depression: Explanations of its behaviour’, \textit{Economic Record}, Vol. 20, June 1944, pp. 58-73. Also Dyer comments on farmers who planted wheat when the returns were lower than the costs of production. ‘Wheat, not economics, dominated the farmers life.’ Dyer, \textit{op. cit.}, 1974, p. 48.

my block and have battled on even when it seemed a hopeless task for us all’.\footnote{33} Similarly, David Crabtree was determined to retain his block. ‘I am damned if I am going to be starved out and let some other swine get the benefit of it’.\footnote{34}

Even when settlers, persuaded that their situation was hopeless, were prepared to transfer, they were unlikely to find buyers. William Frizzel was prepared to leave but

\begin{quote}
No one realises more than me that this can’t go on indefinitely and I am raising heaven and earth to find a purchaser for this holding. I must admit that on several nights I roam the paddocks with worry, so far I have been unable to find a purchaser ... I don’t know if I am standing on my head or my heels. I am doing my utmost, working like a nigger from dawn to dark and am unable to satisfy anybody.\footnote{35}
\end{quote}

The C.S.B. still expected settlers to find the elusive purchaser. Even if a buyer could be found, settlers were aware that he was unlikely to be any more successful. One alternative was to walk out, leaving the C.S.B. to salvage whatever they could. If the settler did vacate his block, it would later be subdivided and allocated to neighbouring settlers.

\textit{Settlers’ Moral Code, Doing the ‘Right Thing’}

A number of soldier settlers had a strong sense of duty and were determined to do ‘the right thing’ by the C.S.B. They were prepared to pay the C.S.B. as much as

\footnote{33}{PROV, VPRS 748, Box 45, W. Douglas, Elderslie Estate, lessee to C.S.B., 30.7.29.}
\footnote{34}{PROV, VPRS 748, Box 77, D. Crabtree, Elderslie Estate, lessee to C.S.B., 28.3.31.}
\footnote{35}{PROV, VPRS 748, Box 11, W. Frizzel, Wootong Vale, lessee to C.S.B., 26.6.30.}
possible, irrespective of its effect on their personal situation. Peter Martinich gave the Board all his returns for 1930 and then, with the declining international situation, found himself in serious financial difficulty. To the Board and the city press, Martinich was doing the right thing, but he was making life considerably harder for himself. His case shows the depths to which it was possible for a settler to sink and still survive. Martinich was another settler who should have transferred his block. Inspector Murphy gave a very graphic description of his position. Martinich’s sheep were in poor health and dying:

He said he did not have any money to buy salt for the sheep until friends sent a Christmas box of £5 and £2 went for salt licks. He has lost going on for 100 head of sheep. Lessee is in an almost destitute condition … Lessee is a good worker but, as he said, he is likely to go insane if he has to go on working on the seedlings with a mattock and the rabbits coming in from the north side and his sheep dying.

Table 11.3 shows Martinich’s balance sheet for 1929-31. Murphy noted that additional expenditure was probably overlooked and that:

the balance of £23 to live on for two years for a man, wife and three children and try to save up enough to turn over enough of the four hundred acres to get a progress payment upon.

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36 PROV, VPRS 748, Box 97, P. J. Martinich, Elderslie Estate, lessee to C.S.B., 29.1.31.
37 ibid., Inspector Murphy to the C.S.B., 21.1.31.
38 Blocks containing salt and other chemical compounds placed in the paddock for stock to lick. They are primarily used to address nutrient deficiencies.
40 ibid.
Table 11.3. Balance sheet for P. J. Martinich, Elderslie Estate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income 1929/31</th>
<th>Expenditure 1929/31</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advance on wool (1929)</td>
<td>£100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working for neighbour</td>
<td>£40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gross proceeds sale of wheat</td>
<td>£57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gross proceeds sale of oats</td>
<td>£60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advance on wool (1930)</td>
<td>£150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kerosene</td>
<td>£60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repairs to machinery</td>
<td>£20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superphosphate</td>
<td>£10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rent on scrub block</td>
<td>£34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dipping, (two years)</td>
<td>£20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fencing wire</td>
<td>£6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Millet seed</td>
<td>£6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cartage</td>
<td>£30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheep licks and salt</td>
<td>£16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shearing costs (two years)</td>
<td>£116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drenches</td>
<td>£4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wages for harvesting</td>
<td>£32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Income.</strong></td>
<td><strong>£407</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Expenditure.</strong></td>
<td><strong>£384</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: PROV, VPRS 748, Box 97, P. J. Martinich, ‘pink’ form report, 13.2.31. Compiled by Inspector Murphy from figures supplied by the lessee.

As he was under lien to the C.S.B., the Board took the rest of the wool proceeds directly from the stock agent. Martinich’s case was one of many which made a mockery of the view that ‘no equity meant no incentive’.41

Similarly, George Robbie of Struan saw no hope of improving the situation:

I am unable to make any payment at present, owing to ill health and increasing age. ... The position is becoming more hopeless every year and unless something is done in the way of reducing payments, I cannot see any way of clearing my arrears ... 42

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42 PROV, VPRS 748, Box 131, G. Robbie, Struan Estate, lessee to C.S.C. 25.1.33.
Robbie suffered from three of the main problems that afflicted soldier settlers in the 1930s. He was aging, his health was poor and he was unable to make a profit from farming. In retrospect, Robbie may have been too old to have been allocated a block in the first place.

In 1931 J. R. Shady faced heavy medical expenses for his wife and children. He wrote to the C.S.B. pointing out that ‘It gives me great concern to know that these adverse circumstances make me appear as a defaulter’, an impression the C.S.B. did nothing to counter. Settlers like Pahl, Martinich, Robbie and Shady were doing their best with limited resources. To meet the C.S.B.’s and later the Closer Settlement Commission’s criteria as ‘efficient’ farmers often required more capital than settlers possessed.

A sense of fair play was evident in numerous letters written by settlers to the Board during the Depression. John McVean of Konongwootong North apologised to the C.S.B. for his inability to meet his commitments:

We are passing through hard times at present. I would like the C.S.B. to understand that I am trying to make both ends meet and consider it my duty to make every effort.

43 Ibid., Robbie was fifty-one years of age in 1930. Qualification Certificate documentation.
44 Ibid., In 1926 he had a doctor’s certificate stating that he was suffering from cardiac disease. (Certificate in File.) 6.9.26.
45 PROV, VPRS 748, Box 137, J. R. Shady, Section 20, Casterton, lessee to C.S.B., 28.5.31.
46 PROV, VPRS 748, Box 115, John McVean, Konongwootong Nth Estate, lessee to C.S.B., 16.4.31.
While the C.S.B. blamed the soldier settlers, the latter took a more realistic view of the situation. John McVean wrote that ‘I am living in hope that the Depression will soon lift as I intend to make this a home for my children’.47

Several settlers saw soldier settlement as a continuation of their war service. Dave Pahl wrote to the C.S.B. rejecting any attempt to accuse him of failure:

I am well aware that I am not the only settler who is in financial straits, there are some thousands of them, but when we know what good and glorious work these men have done so that others may live and enjoy good health, I cannot see that they have failed now when they are still fighting for the prosperity of those who are near and dear to them, and when the proposition on which they were labouring was unsound from the beginning.48

These were common responses by settlers who seemed to have no future. Their struggle during the 1920s had given them an emotional attachment to their blocks and the resolve to continue.

The C.S.B. were particularly hard on settlers who broke their promises to the Board. If a settler offered to make a payment from the proceeds of his commodity sales, it was treated as a guaranteed promise and he was reminded if he failed to comply. Charles Dougheney of Glenorchy was unable to meet his commitments in 1930.49 He promised to do better in the future. In 1931, the Board reproached

\[\text{47 ibid., lessee to C.S.B., 14.5.31.}\]
\[\text{48 PROV, VPRS 748, Box 122, D. M. Pahl, Elderslie Estate, lessee to C.S.B., 28.12.30.}\]
\[\text{49 PROV, VPRS 748, Box 44. C. Dougheney, Glenorchy Estate, lessee to C.S.B., 15.12.30.}\]
him for not keeping his promise to get his account up to date. Dougheney stated that he could not predict the wool price and that ‘I will not promise to do what is impossible’. David Crabtree also refused to make promises:

I am not going to promise anything to the Board again as when the time comes for the promise to be fulfilled with cropping, at least on this place, its another thing and then it takes some explaining.

The economic climate made any promises irrelevant. If settlers were efficient enough to attempt financial budgeting, the constantly changing financial situation made the exercise useless. The C.S.B. ignored the economy and continued to write, reminding settlers of their promises.

Consolidation of Debts

At the onset of the Depression, it became possible for settlers to have their liabilities restructured and taken over by the C.S.B., with consequent savings in interest payments. A number of soldier settlers ignored the positive aspects and concentrated on the negative aspects of consolidation. The main problem was that the Board required them to give security over all their privately owned stock and property. In 1930, Ernest Arnold of Warrong owed the C.S.B. £4,888-6-6 and needed to pay £340 a year to keep his arrears from increasing. He refused to sign a consolidation agreement because

50 ibid., C.S.B. to lessee, 26.11.31.
51 PROV, VPRS 748, Box 77, D. Crabtree, Elderslie Estate, lessee to C.S.B., 30.3.30.
52 PROV, VPRS 748, Box 4, E. Arnold, Warrong Estate, lessee to E. E. Bond, MLA, 1.4.30.
I could not think of leaving my wife and family destitute in just a few years time and that is the position they would be in if I signed over such assets. I have tried hard to make a success of this block and it’s no fault of mine that it won’t pay its way.\textsuperscript{53}

Similarly, J. L. Seymour of Glenorchy wanted to avoid giving the C.S.B. security over his privately-owned livestock as these had been purchased with his wife’s private capital.\textsuperscript{54} As usual, the C.S.B. refused to accept the settlers’ arguments.

At the same time, William Capelhorn of Elderslie owed £5,987-7-2 to various creditors.\textsuperscript{55} He initially refused to sign a restructuring agreement on the advice of his local Member of Parliament.\textsuperscript{56} In early 1931, a ‘pink’ form report described his situation as follows: ‘Position terrible, lessee is too far in debt to survive and must fail’.\textsuperscript{57} Capelhorn was £1,359-16-6 in arrears with his instalments to the C.S.B. and £380 per year was required to keep them from increasing.\textsuperscript{58} His 1931 wool returns were only £196-19-7 net and with little other income, he had no hope of reducing his arrears.\textsuperscript{59} In 1933, in a ‘pink’ form report, it was noted that

\textsuperscript{53} \textit{ibid.}, lessee to C.S.B., 29.7.31.
\textsuperscript{54} PROV, VPRS 748, Box 136, J. L. Seymour, Glenorchy Estate, lessee to C.S.B., 5.11.30.
\textsuperscript{55} PROV, VPRS 748, Box 26, W. Capelhorn, Elderslie Estate, C.S.B. to lessee. 23.12.30.
\textsuperscript{56} \textit{ibid.}, Inspector Murphy to C.S.B., 21.1.31.
\textsuperscript{57} \textit{ibid.}, ‘pink’ form report, Inspector Murphy, 28.2.31.
\textsuperscript{58} \textit{ibid.}, C.S.B. to lessee. 5.2.31.
\textsuperscript{59} \textit{ibid.}, Wool returns. He had fifteen bales in total and his top price was fourteen and a half pence per pound. 19.2.31.
He is in a lamentable position and talks of suicide and means it, I feel sure ... prospects none whatsoever ... The rabbits destroy the pasture and the case is heart rending.\(^{60}\)

From the figures available, Capelhorn had no apparent hope of success. However, he was able to remain in occupation and was allocated another 508 acres. Capelhorn’s instalments of £1,328-9-10 were written down to £381 between 1935 and 1937. In 1936, his inspector described his prospects as ‘good’ and he was still in residence in 1938.\(^{61}\) Arnold and Capelhorn were the type of settlers that conservative politicians wanted removed from their blocks.\(^{62}\) Paradoxically, the policy changes designed to force them off their blocks provided the means of their survival.\(^{63}\) These changes will be examined in the next chapter.

Settlers who agreed to have their debts consolidated, gained several advantages. Firstly, consolidation saved them the indignity of having their creditors approaching them whenever they sold anything. William Frizzel of Wootong Vale was subjected to this indignity. He sold pigs, which did not realise as much as he had hoped and

all my creditors somehow got wind of this sale of pigs and started suing me, what with writs of attachment and distress warrants executed by the police, my

\(^{60}\) ibid., ‘pink’ form report, 12.7.33.

\(^{61}\) ibid., ‘pink’ form report, 4.11.36.

\(^{62}\) See chapter twelve.

only alternative was either let them have the pigs or go insolvent which I don’t want to do if I can possibly help it.\textsuperscript{64}

Secondly, consolidation enhanced settlers’ reputations in their local towns. Previously, in the event of failure, the Board had first charge over the assets and there was usually little left for other creditors. After consolidation, the C.S.B. paid out other debtors who would be more inclined to support settlers when economic conditions improved. While the concession may have been offered in good faith, settlers were only concerned with the repercussions if they failed.

\textit{The Lack of Trust Between Settlers and C.S.B.}

During the Depression, a number of settlers were forced to resort to activities deemed by the Board to be illegal in order to retain enough money to live on. Settlers’ dislike of liens\textsuperscript{65} led to various attempts to avoid the restriction. L. E. Glare refused to give the C.S.B. a lien over his crop, as he would lose the entire establishment and harvesting costs. Glare felt that the C.S.B. had lost faith in him and responded angrily to its attempt to order him to sign a lien:

\begin{quote}
It appears that I am regarded as a thief, as a no good, as a man whose word is worth nothing. I claim that I have stood up to my word 100\% and I still pledge my word to do so. I am not responsible for the times, God knows they are bad, but don’t help to make them worse for me.\textsuperscript{66}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{64} PROV, VPRS 748, Box 11, W. Frizzel, Wootong Vale Estate, lessee to C.S.B., 26.6.30.
\textsuperscript{65} See chapter ten for a discussion on liens.
\textsuperscript{66} PROV, VPRS 748, Box 61, L. E. Glare, Warrong Estate, lessee to C.S.B., 26.12.30.
Settlers had various stratagems for avoiding lien arrangements. The most common practice was to sell produce elsewhere and hope the C.S.B. did not find out. William Baudinette of Denholm Green sent part of his cream to Merino and the rest to Coleraine. Baudinette gave all the proceeds of the Merino cream to the C.S.B. and kept the Coleraine proceeds for himself. The C.S.B. did not approve, especially when they discovered the lessee was keeping the larger portion. Baudinette’s poorly received excuse was that he was using the additional money to improve his farm.

Settlers who lived near the South Australian border had a further opportunity to avoid the C.S.B. as they could sell their produce interstate. Dave Pahl sold 150 bags of wheat privately in 1929 and kept the proceeds. The C.S.B. found out and questioned the lessee. Pahl replied that he had only received £30 from his wool proceeds to live on and needed the wheat income to pay off outside debts. The gross return from the wheat was only £87 and there was not a great profit in the crop after the expenses were deducted. Harvesting cost £20 in wages, 150 sacks were required at eleven shillings per dozen, and cartage to the railway station cost twenty-two shillings per ton. This left an estimated gross profit of £40-6-0

67 PROV, VPRS 748, Box 7, W. L. Baudinette, Denholm Green Estate, C.S.B., to lessee, 14.1.33.
68 PROV, VPRS 748, Box 122, D. M. Pahl, C.S.B. to lessee, 23.3.29.
69 Ibid., lessee to C.S.B., 27.3.29.
70 Ibid., lessee to C.S.B., 16.7.29.
71 There are twelve bags of wheat to the ton.
which excluded the cost of the seed, Pahl’s personal labour and the loss of the paddock for approximately eight months.\footnote{340} The unfortunate part about the wheat sale was that the C.S.B. would receive the whole £87 while the settler lost the value of his inputs.

A number of settlers continued to have doubts about the C.S.B.’s, and later the C.S.C.’s, understanding of farming. For example, neither body seemed to understand that wool was sold in the order in which it was received in store. A settler who despatched his wool to his wool broker in November, probably had it sold in March or April. With experience, the C.S.B. should have been able to estimate the time delay between shearing and sale. However, they usually wrote several letters to each settler asking the sale date. John McGrath of Hilgay became annoyed with the C.S.B.’s annual questions about his wool sale and finally replied:

\begin{quote}
Sir
Usual time, Feb or Mar.
Yours faithfully,
McGrath.\footnote{PROV, VPRS 748, Box 111, J. McGrath, Hilgay Estate, lessee to C.S.B., 10.1.33.}
\end{quote}

Peter Martinich was another settler who might have wondered at the C.S.B.’s knowledge of farming.\footnote{PROV, VPRS 748, Box 97, P. J. Martinich, Elderslie Estate, C.S.B. to lessee, 12.7.32.} In 1932, he wanted to dig a forty foot drainage bore to

\footnote{340}{In addition, the wheat removed more nutrients from the soil than grazing.}
drain a swamp and was duly advanced £10 to buy wood to box the shaft.\textsuperscript{75} The wood was delivered in June, and in July Martinich received a harsh letter from the C.S.B. because he had not dug the bore. In that era, bores were dug by hand. A shovel full of dirt removed from the ground during a normal July in the Elderslie area would be full of water in a few minutes.\textsuperscript{76} To dig a hole forty feet deep in the middle of a swamp in winter was (and still is) physically impossible throughout much of South West Victoria. It is apparent that the administrators in charge of soldier settlement did not understand conditions in the area.

Similarly, Inquiry Boards continued to make recommendations that were contradicted by the evidence. C. M. H. Kilburn was summoned before a Board in 1932 to show why he should not forfeit his block.\textsuperscript{77} The members were not impressed with the lessee, one concluding that ‘the longer he is left on the place the greater will be his liabilities to the Board and I can only class him as hopeless’. He had difficulty in understanding Kilburn:

\begin{quote}
I find it difficult to know how to class this settler. I would not like to class him as being indolent but it would appear to me that his knowledge and experience in sheep must have been limited when he took over the place.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{75} Drainage bores work in reverse to normal bores. Surface water is drained into an empty underground cavity.

\textsuperscript{76} This is a personal observation based on the fact that I live in the same area. In the 1930s the situation would have been worse as the soil had not been built up with superphosphate and improved pastures. This has made the soil less boggy.

\textsuperscript{77} PROV, VPRS 748, Box 88, C. M. H. Kilburn, Warrong Estate, Inquiry Board, 27.7.32.
The Board members examined, and counted, the sheep on the block concluding that the ‘stock now on the place is 632 sheep in good condition and well looked after, although most of his holding is waterlogged’. In that era, very few soldier settlers ran more than one sheep to the acre so Kilburn was doing a very good job to keep his sheep in good condition and well looked after on his wet, 655-acre block. The comments of the Inquiry Board raise more questions about the experience of the members than of the lessee. Kilburn survived the Inquiry Board and later in the year, Inspector Bowman reported to the C.S.B. that ‘this man has been very unsatisfactory of late and abusive towards the Board’. Kilburn’s response was probably due to being treated unfairly and realising that the C.S.B. wanted him to vacate his holding. Irrespective of the Inquiry Board's report, Kilburn was able to remain in occupation. In 1935, the C.S.C. agreed to drain part of Kilburn’s block. He finally paid off his block in 1956. Later reports described Kilburn as a ‘good’ or ‘very good’ settler. The C.S.B. may have wanted his block to augment other holdings.

Some soldier settlers considered themselves better farmers than their neighbours and thought that they were making greater efforts to meet their commitments. George Black of Nangeela wrote to the C.S.B. in 1931 estimating that the fall in

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78 ibid., Inspector Bowman to C.S.B., 24.11.32.
79 ibid., C.S.C. to lessee, 1.8.35.
80 PROV, VPRS 5714, Box 674, C. M. H. Kilburn, Warrong Estate, Revaluation File, 2.8.56.
the price of cream and pigs lowered his income by £300 for the year.\textsuperscript{81} Black concluded that ‘I’ve always tried to pay my way and be fair to the Board and if all settlers had done this, things would have been much better today’. T. F. Keiller from Henty’s Estate became very annoyed with other settlers in 1932.\textsuperscript{82} He ‘found it difficult enough to make ends meet’ and resented the fact that other settlers were not ‘being compelled to meet their obligations or to make any proper effort’. Inspector Murphy reported the conversation to the C.S.B:

He requires to know what the department intends doing. He spoke very severely about S. Craig of Glenorchy. He could not see the justice or sense of dragging the last shilling out of decent people to allow the wasters like so and so to carry on. He says he is waiting to see what is going to be done as things cannot go on much longer as he knows they are being allowed. He was not prepared to make a payment to me.\textsuperscript{83}

Keiller had the capacity to make payments, but refused because he felt that settlers prepared to work and make an effort were discriminated against.\textsuperscript{84} He finally paid but wanted reconsideration.\textsuperscript{85}

An editorial in \textit{The Age} enlarged upon this theme in October 1930.\textsuperscript{86} The writer saw concessions as only encouraging settlers to sit back and wait for further

\textsuperscript{81} PROV, VPRS 748, Box 12, G. Black, Nangeela Estate, lessee to C.S.B., 7.3.31.
\textsuperscript{82} PROV, VPRS 748, Box 86, T. F. Keiller, Henty’s Estate, Inspector Murphy to C.S.B., 9.8.32.
\textsuperscript{83} \textit{ibid}.
\textsuperscript{84} \textit{ibid.}, Inspector Murphy to C.S.B., 3.1.33.
\textsuperscript{85} \textit{ibid.}, lessee to C.S.C. 7.2.33.
\textsuperscript{86} \textit{The Age}, 18.10.1930.
assistance whenever conditions deteriorated. Mr Justice Pike seems to have been influenced by this continuing negative propaganda, arguing that there was no doubt a certain percentage of soldier settlers who never intended to make good, and whose sole object in taking up holdings was to make as much as possible out of the concessions being offered by the various States and when that source of income had been worn out they simply abandoned their holdings and left them.\footnote{Mr Justice Pike, \textit{op. cit.}, 1929, p. 24.}

This conclusion is questionable, as the majority of soldier settlers had moved onto their blocks before concessions were introduced. While Pike admitted that settlers had to contend with falling rural commodity prices and inflated farm inputs, necessitating concessions, he still blamed settlers for taking up blocks in order to obtain concessions. In Victoria interest was mainly written off, not advances or rents, which qualifies his conclusion further.\footnote{\textit{ibid.}, p. 19.} Pike quantified his criticism by concluding that, by 1929, the ‘slackers’ and opportunists had been weeded out and ‘the soldier settler holders of Australia, will compare more than favourably with any other body of settlers in the different States’.\footnote{\textit{ibid.}, p. 25.}

Pike also reported that the fall in rural commodity prices was ‘brought about chiefly … by over-production due to soldier settlement’.\footnote{\textit{ibid.}, p. 10.} However, the fall in the prices of agricultural commodities occurred before the majority of settlers had
an opportunity to start marketing their produce. In addition, as noted above, in the immediate post-war years, farmers were encouraged to produce more to help reduce Australia’s war debt.91

These anti-settler sentiments could have affected settlers’ perceptions of their fellows. As noted earlier Peter Martinich was in a difficult financial position and in 1931 it was reported that his ‘greatest dread is that we would suspect him of loafing’.92 William Capelhorn wrote to the C.S.B appealing against a refusal to grant an advance. He took the opportunity to compare himself with his neighbours:

   do you expect me to live on fresh air? I know of other settlers who are getting a big pension and do very little on their block and are milking more cows than I am and you send them big advances by return mail.93

In fairness to settlers criticised by their neighbours and the press, while a number may have been ‘loafers’, others were working to the best of their ability while drifting further into arrears.

The Cost of Living

There were positive and negative aspects of living on soldier settlement blocks during the Depression. Settlers’ had a greater opportunity to produce their own food than people living in the cities. David Crabtree reported in 1932 that ‘I grow

91 Journal of the Department of Agriculture of Victoria, vol. 18, April 1920.
92 PROV, VPRS 748, Box 97, P. J. Martinich, lessee to C.S.B., 30.3.31.
93 PROV, VPRS 748, Box 26, W. Capelhorn, Elderslie Estate, lessee to C.S.B., 29.4.33.
my own potatoes and vegetables and produce butter and eggs and meat but I can’t make clothes and groceries’.94 Clothes, sewing materials and groceries cost more in the country due to the increased freight, and the lower turnover, which negated the advantages of home produced food.95

Wally Douglas commented on the cost of living in 1932:

> All groceries are a long way above city prices and we have to pay cartage, in our case 25 miles. Bread costs 1/- a loaf to deliver. Some settlers’ wives make their own with mixed success, it’s a mass production job, and good bread is essential. Potatoes, onions and other heavy goods are very dear on account of cartage.96

Suitable working clothes were expensive and not easy to obtain locally.

> As for clothes, we can’t go round the shops and buy the cheapest and most suitable garments, we have to write away for them and often have to take articles the shopkeepers are most anxious to get rid of. That does not make for economy. We need more clothes than a man who is not a hard worker, boots last no time, and clothes are soon in rags when doing hard manual labour as is required on a block.97

While Douglas does not mention credit availability, mail order establishments were unlikely to still let settlers operate accounts during the Depression. Initially settlers had been able to gain credit at their local store which became essential as

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94 PROV, VPRS 748, Box 77, D. Crabtree, Elderslie Estate, lessee to C.S.B., 28.3.31.

95 However, living in the city was still primitive by today’s standards. See K. Darian-Smith, *On the Home Front: Melbourne in Wartime, 1939-1945*, Oxford University Press, South Melbourne, 1990.

96 Douglas Papers. Letter from Wally Douglas to W. S. Manifold MLC. March 1932. (No specific date on letter)

97 *ibid.*
conditions deteriorated. Mr Walter of Greenhills appreciated his local storekeeper. At a soldier settlers’ meeting at Hamilton in 1930, he stated that

They went to the war and did their best, though, [sic] but for the storekeepers - it is they who are repatriating the men - the soldier settlers would have been on the road long ago.98

As more settlers had liens placed over their saleable production, their chances of gaining credit at the local store declined. Peter Martinich had trouble obtaining his necessities from the store:

I have neither working shirt or boots and my garments are mere rags and my credit has been stopped at the store as they know I should have funds to pay at this time so my family shall soon be without food.99

Storekeepers knew when settlers sold produce. While they were prepared to wait for their money, they expected to be paid when funds became available.

Settlers also had to find money for a number of incidental expenses associated with running a farm:

There are breakages where least expected, possible trips to the nearest town for sudden requirements. Plough shares to purchase, oil, binder twine, broken tools to repair, axes, shovels etc. Maybe timber or iron for repairs and a host of other possibilities incidental to running expenses. And all these expenses have to be met out of the settlers’ so called living allowance.100

100 Douglas Papers. Letter from Wally Douglas to W. S. Manifold MLC op. cit.
Regardless of how well a settler budgeted, he would still have unexpected costs and as Douglas points out, these had to be paid for out of families’ living expenses.

*Changes in Perceptions Towards Soldier Settlement*

As the Depression intensified and the losses attributed to soldier settlement mounted, the perceptions of the press and politicians towards soldier settlers declined further. The positive sentiment initially displayed towards the ‘diggers’ by the general population almost completely disappeared, with the deepening losses of the scheme.\(^{101}\) The ideology, in which settlers perceived to be inefficient ‘triers’ were supported, was replaced by one of efficiency.\(^{102}\) Efficient farmers were to be encouraged while inefficient ‘triers’ were expected to transfer their blocks. By the early 1930s the city press, and a number of politicians, were calling for a policy of ‘brutality’ in which only the strong and efficient would survive.\(^{103}\) City newspapers, while critical of the majority, supported successful ‘industrious men’ but many struggling settlers could also be described as industrious.\(^{104}\) The C.S.B. itself saw that the position was untenable. It recommended that the administration be removed from political control as ‘the

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\(^{102}\) This was not restricted to soldier settlers, farming was changing and ‘efficiency’ was becoming more important.


pressure by the representatives of the community only serves to prejudice the actions of the Board and subvert its powers and responsibilities’.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown the problems caused by the collapse in rural commodity prices during the Great Depression. From a purely economic point of view, a number of settlers should have transferred their blocks. As the Depression worsened it became imperative, for both political and economic reasons, that the State government attempt to put soldier settlement on a more businesslike basis. The Depression provided an environment in which it became was politically acceptable to make the necessary changes.

The next chapter will address the formation of the Closer Settlement Commission in 1932. During the five years of its administration, there would be a radical change in the treatment of soldier settlers. The Nationalist/Country Party coalition government which appointed the C.S.C. expected it to be ‘brutal’ in removing the supposed ‘slackers’ and inefficient ‘triers’ while, at the same time, helping the more efficient settlers to succeed.

Chapter Twelve

The Era of ‘Brutality’. The Work of the Closer Settlement Commission

Practically all our exports come from the land; therefore the maintenance of our primary producing industries is the only sane way of correcting the adverse trade balance and maintaining the trade balance in our favour.

A. A. Dunstan, MLA.¹

Introduction

Paradoxically, the 1930s was a decade in which soldier settlers who had faced failure were able to have their holdings placed on a relatively sound footing. At the commencement of the Closer Settlement Commission's term in 1932, struggling settlers had little confidence in their ability to survive. While the future prospects in the Hamilton region looked bleak, the reality was not as harsh as their expectations. The majority of settlers who had survived to 1932 were still there in 1938 when the C.S.C. was disbanded.

The Commission was appointed for a five-year term, with the express task of reversing the losses of the soldier settlement scheme. The members were expected to take hard decisions and remove inefficient and unviable farmers. F. W. Eggleston, the former Victorian Attorney General, was no longer in Parliament when he advocated that ‘Its task should be to close up and liquidate the experiment altogether’.² The C.S.C. had a different and more realistic attitude

towards soldier settlers and their troubles. The difference between the rhetoric that surrounded the appointment of the C.S.C. and the reality that affected the settlers will be the main theme of this chapter.

The Establishment of the C.S.C.

On the nineteenth of May 1932 as the Depression continued, the Labor Government of E. J. Hogan was defeated and the United Australia Party and United Country Party coalition government of Sir Stanley Argyle was elected to office. A group of young conservative politicians including Robert Menzies, J. A. Gray and Wilfred Kent Hughes had been calling for changes to Soldier Settlement since 1929. They wanted the application of ‘business methods’ to soldier settlement and for the government to have the ‘courage of brutality’ to abandon the sentiments which accompanied the establishment of the scheme and stop the drain on the state’s resources. Their philosophy helped the new government formulate their soldier settlement policy.

Under the Soldier Settlement Act of 1932, soldier settlement was taken out of the control of the Closer Settlement Board and administered by a Commission headed by Melbourne businessman Clive McPherson. The C.S.C. had five members, two

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4 ibid., p. 233. J. A. Gray is quoted as using the phrase.
5 ibid., p. 232.
6 ibid., pp. 233 - 234.
of them part time. Essentially, it was a new body although Norman H. Malcolm served on both the Board and the Commission.

The Closer Settlement Commission was given wide powers and was ‘to a great extent independent of ministerial control’. This was to prevent politicians ‘interfering’ on behalf of soldier settlers. Critics, in the C.S.B., the press and the parliament, had opposed this ‘interference’. W. McIver, the Chairman of the C.S.B., had been calling for the administration to be removed from ministerial control since 1924. In its 1931 Annual Report, the C.S.B. noted that

> It is the almost invariable practice for cancellation of leases to be resisted through political channels. The Board was instituted by Parliament and the pressure by the representatives of the community only serves to prejudice the actions of the Board and subvert, its powers and responsibilities. It places the political representative in an invidious position and imposes the Minister administering the Department the unenviable task of either resisting the requests of his fellow Members or revoking the decision of the Board in which he had previously concurred.

Robert Menzies suggested, in 1929, that

> every officer was liable to the direct intervention of members of parliament, acting on behalf of their constituents. The officers have been subjected to almost intolerable pressure by this sort of thing.

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8 *Argus*, 29.8.1924.


A leading article in *The Age* of October 15 1930 concluded that the biggest problem with soldier settlement was political interference, as members of parliament sought and obtained concessions for settlers in their electorates.12

The appointment of an independent Commission signified a considerable change from the pre-war experiences with closer settlement. The Royal Commission into the failure of closer settlement13 in the pre-war period had placed the blame for the failure of the scheme on the Land Purchase and Management Board.14 The Royal Commission contained politicians who, naturally, absolved themselves of any blame and, recommended that there should be ‘more ministerial control over the process of settlement and more involvement by experienced and allegedly, disinterested persons outside the Board’.15 The replacement of the C.S.B. with the C.S.C. was a repudiation of this earlier recommendation. It was apparent that neither ‘ministerial control’ nor involvement by ‘experienced and allegedly disinterested persons’ had been as beneficial as expected.

News of the formation of the new Commission upset soldier settlers who felt they would be denied any means of redress in the event of unjust treatment. It is understandable, from the government’s point of view, why they preferred settlers

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15 *ibid.*, p. 533.
not to contact their local Members of Parliament whenever they were in trouble.

The local member was usually able to have the original decision overturned. One typical example of parliamentary intervention on a settler’s behalf was that of H. V. G. Milton of Rolfe’s Land Estate.\(^\text{16}\) Neither the C.S.B. nor his inspector regarded Milton as a good settler. By 1929, his arrears were over £800 and he had been evading his lien by selling part of his cream to another butter factory and keeping the proceeds.\(^\text{17}\) His excuse was that the privately sold cream came from cows belonging to his wife.

Milton was on a small block with only twenty-two cows. Inspector Campbell reported that his position was hopeless and that he should be given six months to find a buyer; an almost impossible task in 1930. Milton was then granted additional advances of £33 for seed wheat and superphosphate. Such advances were often provided, even when the cancellation of the lease was in progress. Advances at this stage were only increasing an already unserviceable level of debt.


\(^\text{17}\) \textit{ibid.}, Milton had signed a half lien over his cream returns. 12.2.29. Liens were normally signed with one butter factory and the factory was required to remit an agreed percentage of the proceeds directly to the C.S.B.
Nothing further was done about Milton’s marginal financial situation until 1931 when he was in trouble for selling eight cows and retaining the proceeds for his own use.\textsuperscript{18} An Inquiry Board convened and Supervisor McDougall reported that

He did not impress me as being too straight in his transactions … I am convinced that this man has not played the game in the past and the longer he is left on the place the greater will be his liabilities to the Board.\textsuperscript{19}

The Board recommended that the C.S.B. recall his advances and instruct him to vacate the property.\textsuperscript{20} Milton refused and wrote to W. Slater MLA for help to remain on the property.\textsuperscript{21} A reprieve was granted with Slater’s help, although Inspector Younger reported that the ‘lessee is a failure and will never be able to overtake his arrears’.\textsuperscript{22}

Milton was the type of settler the C.S.C. was expected to force off his block. He was seen as dishonest and a failure who was excessively in arrears with his instalments. However, Milton remained in occupation as the C.S.C. developed a similar reluctance, in the Hamilton district at least, to order the cancellation of settlers’ leases. In 1934, the Commission admitted that Milton did not have a living area.\textsuperscript{23} He was transferred to another allotment and his previous block was

\textsuperscript{18} ibid., Supervisor McDougall to C.S.B., 23.9.31.

\textsuperscript{19} ibid., Inquiry Board, Report by Supervisor McDougall, 23.9.31.

\textsuperscript{20} ibid., C.S.B. to lessee, 5.11.31.

\textsuperscript{21} ibid., Letter to W. Slater, MLA, 19.7.32.

\textsuperscript{22} ibid., Inspector Younger to C.S.B., 12.9.32.

\textsuperscript{23} ibid., Report by Valuer Christie and Supervisor Cavanagh, 27.2.34.
subdivided to build up two adjoining soldier settlement farms. Milton had previously been blamed for poor management but, if his block was an uneconomic unit, managerial expertise would not enable him to overtake his arrears. Inspector Younger conceded that Milton had been hampered by a lack of capital and seven children under the age of twelve years.\(^{24}\) He was still on his new block in 1938 and his file contained no further adverse reports. Recourse to outside assistance and a change in policy enabled Milton to survive.

*Soldier Settlers Required a ‘sufficient area of suitable land’*

In 1925, the Royal Commissioners had conceded that some blocks were too small to be economically viable, concluding that

> When and where possible, additional land will have to be found by subdividing forfeited and abandoned blocks and acquiring adjoining new land where it is procurable at a satisfactory price.\(^ {25}\)

This was one of the more useful recommendations of the Commission. However, while a small number of blocks were enlarged, it was initially carried out in an ad hoc fashion with many eligible settlers failing to receive additional land.\(^ {26}\) In 1929, Mr Justice Pike concurred, suggesting that settlers should, at the minimum, have a ‘home maintenance area’, defined as:

\(^{24}\) *ibid.*, Inspector Younger to Appeal Board, 1934.


\(^{26}\) The 1927 Inquiry Boards investigated 3,542 cases, judging that 1,247 settlers did not have living areas. However by mid-1928 only 262 settlers had received extra land. Lake, *op. cit.*, 1987, p. 225.
such an area as would under average seasons and circumstances, return him [the soldier settler] from his labour thereon an amount sufficient to meet his commitments to the Crown, and also to maintain himself and his family.27

With hindsight, Wadham shows how a ‘home maintenance area’ was difficult to establish without at least a moderate degree of price stability.28 This stability did not exist during the latter half of the 1920s and much of the 1930s. He later made the point that, when the committee, appointed to work out the home maintenance area in the Mallee, calculated the area of land needed, they took four shillings per bushel as the average price for wheat. Within four years, the price had declined to one shilling and sixpence per bushel. The ‘home maintenance area’ on Mallee blocks would have to be over twice the size previously calculated. Conditions in the Western District were not as extreme, but the same principle applied.

The C.S.C. was determined to finally address the issue of block sizes. It recognised that one of the biggest problems faced by soldier settlers was that, like Milton, many of them had insufficient land to be economically viable. The C.S.C. believed that unless settlers had a ‘sufficient area of suitable land’ all other concessions were likely to be ineffective.29 The Closer Settlement Act of 1932 removed the statutory limitations on the value or acreage of holdings, enabling

27 Pike, op. cit., 1929, p. 23.
29 ibid.
blocks to be built up to living areas even though this caused greater indebtedness for the settler.

The Commission inspected blocks and compiled reports on the men’s suitability to receive extra land. In a similar approach to that taken with the Qualification Certificates, little notice seems to have been taken of the reports. J. C. Falconer of Elderslie was described as ‘Failure. Block not worked to advantage. Neglected in the past. Has been placed on probation by the Commission’. Falconer was still allocated extra land and managed to survive.\(^{30}\)

The problem with providing extra acreage was that suitable land had to be available in the vicinity. On some estates, vacated blocks were available for re-subdivision. In other districts, the only way settlers could be built up to an economic area was for neighbours to surrender their blocks. When this was not feasible, the Commission was able to provide other assistance to settlers.

*Writing Down of Instalments*

The C.S.C. consolidated all settlers’ debts from land and advances. Previously, consolidation had been vigorously opposed but now it was accepted as inevitable. The Commission also reviewed payments of principal and interest for five years from the 1st July 1932.\(^ {31}\) It recognised that the economic situation was making it impossible for settlers to meet their commitments, something that the C.S.B. had

\(^{30}\) PROV, VPRS 5,714, Box 1,146, Re-subdivision File, 4.2.35.

\(^{31}\) PROV, VPRS 5,714, Box 1,146.
never publicly acknowledged. Previously, settlers had been expected to find the 
money, regardless of economic or personal circumstances, but now their ability to 
pay was taken into account. The review of instalments was undertaken on an 
annual basis and seasonal conditions, prices of primary products and other 
subsidiary factors were examined. The C.S.C. had the statutory power to reduce 
the amount owing and write off the balance. The procedure was two-tiered. First 
invoices were issued for the full amount with a rider noting that the account was 
subject to adjustment. Then a second invoice was sent out with the adjusted 
instalment.

Adjusted accounts showed the C.S.C. understood the variable nature of farming. 
The measure transferred more of the risks from the settler to the government, as 
the latter had to forgo any chance of recouping the outstanding amount. However, 
if the settler failed, the state recouped even less. The average assessments of a 
sample of fifty-seven settlers in the Hamilton district were written down to 
approximately forty-four per cent of the original. (Table 12.1)

Table 12.1. Average amount written down for a selection of fifty-seven settlers in 
the Hamilton District

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of Adjustment</th>
<th>Original Instalment (£A)</th>
<th>Written Down Instalment</th>
<th>Percentage reduction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1933-34</td>
<td>£256</td>
<td>£106</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1934-35</td>
<td>£240</td>
<td>£86</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1935-36</td>
<td>£259</td>
<td>£120</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1937</td>
<td>£264</td>
<td>£130</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Advances Files for Settlers in the Hamilton Administrative District.
As in earlier concessions, those in the greatest financial difficulty gained the greatest benefit. J. C. Falconer’s instalments were written down from £1,644 to £446 between 1933 and 1937. A seventy-three per cent reduction was a substantial concession for a man who had previously been threatened with eviction.  

Similarly, P. T. Dix had faced an Inquiry Board in 1928, which recommended that he be given fourteen days to pay up his arrears or have his lease terminated. Supervisor Norman Malcolm noted in his report that ‘His word has proved so unreliable that I would not accept any offer to give security over privately owned stock or plant in lieu of payment’. 

Dix managed to avoid eviction and over the life of the C.S.C. had sixty-six per cent of his instalments written off.

Inefficient settlers sometimes received greater concessions than men perceived to be competent farmers. Peter Martinich’s inspectors regarded him as a good settler. However, he had heavy stock losses through liver fluke infestations in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Martinich’s stock losses, previous attempts to do the right thing by the Board, and continuing destitution did not seem to have been taken into account when the instalment levels were set. He only received an

32 PROV, VPRS 748, Box 50, J. C. Falconer, Elderslie Estate, ‘The man is not capable of the heavy job, mentally, physically or financially. The block is not a good one and the man is not “stout”.’ ‘Pink’ form report, 3.9.32.

33 PROV, VPRS 748, Box 43, P. T. Dix, Greenhills Estate, Supervisor Norman Malcolm. to C.S.B., 11.7.28.

34 PROV, VPRS 748, Box 97, P. J. Martinich, Elderslie Estate, Inspector Murphy to C.S.B., 21.1.31.

35 See chapter ten.
average thirty per cent reduction in instalments over the life of the C.S.C. An element of the old animosity between settler and administration may have carried over into the Commission as the same inspectors were employed.

The official criterion used to assess the reduction in instalments was the settler’s ability to pay. His efficiency as a farmer was not given a high priority. The percentage reduction usually had little correlation with the respective settler’s farming ability. Settlers who had done their best, but got into arrears through factors beyond their control, gained smaller concessions than others who regularly received adverse reports. However, R. G Mitchell, the only settler from the Hamilton administrative district identified as being constantly up to date with his instalments, had nothing written off.

The policies of the C.S.C. helped soldier settlers gain some financial security during the 1930s, in spite of the economic conditions. While it is generally recognised that recovery from the Great Depression was underway by the end of 1933, the rural outlook remained bleak until the end of the decade. While production increased and there were some improvements in commodity prices, they were insignificant. Macintyre notes that between 1930 and 1935, half of the

36 PROV, VPRS 748, Box 97, P. J. Martinich, Elderslie Estate, Invoices for years 1933 - 1937.
37 PROV, VPRS 748, Box 100, R. G. Mitchell, Hilgay Estate,
39 Appendix Seven: Commodity Prices
nation’s 60,000 wheat growers were unable to recover their production costs. Davidson notes that the Depression did not conclude for the rural sector until the outbreak of World War Two.

Conclusion

Notwithstanding the fears of the soldier settlers, the appointment of the Closer Settlement Commission had a positive effect on their fortunes. The C.S.C. recognised that until settlers had ‘a sufficient area of suitable land’, they had no hope of success. Similarly, it acknowledged that a diverse number of factors influenced a settler’s ability to make annual payments. The C.S.B. had previously rejected these critical factors. In addition to the financial benefits from these two changes, the C.S.C.’s more realistic attitude was a psychological boost. No longer would soldier settlers be blamed for circumstances beyond their control.

As the 1930s continued, the majority of settlers in the region were able to meet their adjusted instalments, aided, in a considerable number of cases, by additional land. In 1937, the C.S.C. conducted a major revaluation of all soldier settlement properties in the State to ensure that every soldier settler had equity in his block. The next chapter will examine these revaluations, the final concessions made to settlers during their long road to ‘success’.

40 ibid., p. 287.
Chapter Thirteen

A Pyrrhic Victory. Settlers Vindicated

The period for which the Commission was appointed will terminate on the 1st of March, 1938, and it may be confidently asserted that the objective of the legislation governing its appointment will then have been achieved, namely the placing of Closer Settlement on such a basis that the great majority of settlers may have a reasonable expectation of a successful outcome of their life’s work and the State may be relieved of the responsibility of providing more money to keep the settlers on the land.

Report of the Closer Settlement Commission. 1937.1

Introduction

The policies of the Closer Settlement Commission helped provide an environment in which soldier settlers could succeed. These policies constituted a victory for reason over rhetoric. Whether the rhetoric concerned the ‘myth of the yeoman’, the doctrine of ‘efficiency’ or the calls for ‘brutality’, the members of the C.S.C. kept their goals firmly in mind. They intended to ensure that every soldier settler, deemed to be efficient, was given ‘a reasonable expectation of a successful outcome of their life’s work’.2

While numerous settlers had complained to the Closer Settlement Board that their blocks were overpriced, the C.S.C. was the first body to take the issue seriously.

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2 ibid.
In 1925, the Royal Commission had taken a narrow view of the question. It considered that overpricing

Applies mainly to mistakes in apportioning the price paid for estates among the sub-divisions, as the former, with few exceptions were well bought. Over-valued blocks imply a corresponding under-valuation of other blocks in the same estate.³

Settlers rejected this argument and in retrospect, it is doubtful if many estates in South West Victoria were ‘well bought’. The suggestion that ‘Over-valued blocks imply a corresponding under-valuation of other blocks’ was likely to divide settlers if they believed the Commissioners. Keneley has discussed the sale of land to the C.S.B., concluding that a substantial number of owners sold ‘unwanted blocks and out paddocks’ for soldier settlement.⁴ If previous owners did not want these blocks, they were unlikely to be the most productive parts of the property.

The Royal Commissioners accepted that a minority of unsuitable blocks had been allocated and saw this as the result of ‘faulty sub-division’. This study suggests that there were far more unsuitable blocks allocated than can be explained away by ‘faulty sub-division’.

During 1937, an important landmark in the history of soldier settlement occurred with the introduction of the final concession enacted by the C.S.C.⁵ This was the

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⁴ Keneley, op. cit., 1999, p. 188.
⁵ Report of the Closer Settlement Commission, 1937, p. 8. ‘The Commission wishes to place on record its firm opinion that when a settler’s liabilities have been adjusted he must recognise that no further concessions will be available whatever the circumstances may be’.
revaluation of every soldier settlement block in the State.\textsuperscript{6} This chapter will examine the revaluation in the Hamilton administrative district and its effect on the viability of the settlers. It will also analyse whether the revaluations came too late for older soldier settlers, and those in declining health, to gain the maximum benefit from them. The stress and uncertainty which had been a continuing element in soldier settlement had taken a physical toll on the men.

\textit{The Commission’s Reasoning}

The Commissioners saw the revaluation as the ‘keystone’ of their endeavours to make soldier settlement viable\textsuperscript{7} They were taking every opportunity to arrive at the ‘establishment of fair values based on the potentialities of the land’.\textsuperscript{8} Improvements carried out by settlers out of their own money were excluded from the valuation and credit was given for capital repayments on land and improvements. Each soldier settler was given sufficient equity in his holding to enable ‘him to meet his annual commitments with a reasonable degree of certainty’.\textsuperscript{9} Settlers now had a practical reason to keep up to date with their adjusted instalments, as those in arrears lost the benefits of the revaluation.

\textsuperscript{6} ibid., p. 6. The C.S.C. had control over five and a half million acres which was one-sixth of the land in Victoria under active production so it can be appreciated that this was a huge task.\textsuperscript{7} ibid.\textsuperscript{8} ibid.\textsuperscript{9} J. M. Garland, ‘The work of the Victorian Closer Settlement Commission’, \textit{Economic Record}, vol. 14, June 1938, p. 73.
As noted above, Mr. Justice Pike concluded in 1929 that the land purchased for soldier settlement had not been over-priced. Soldier settlers rejected this conclusion. Finally, with the revaluation, they were vindicated in their ongoing complaints that blocks had been over-priced, too small, and that the annual repayments were unreasonably high.

During the revaluation, every soldier settlement block in Victoria was inspected by officers of the C.S.C. Settlers were interviewed and a thorough analysis of their financial history, prospects, and physical situation was undertaken. After this, the blocks were revalued, the level of the annual instalments finalised and the mortgages re-negotiated, usually with an extended time for repayment. An examination of the available Revaluation Files suggests that in the Hamilton District the reduction in the amount owing was approximately thirty per cent. This was a significant amount in the light of the previous writing off of arrears, which, in a number of cases, had continued since the early 1920s. Garland has suggested that the C.S.C. may have over-reacted and provided more assistance than was necessary. However, it would be impossible to put a monetary value on the suffering of settlers and their families over the previous two decades.

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11 This is an approximation, as the Revaluation Files (Series 5,714) for the Hamilton district are incomplete.

12 Garland, *op. cit.*, 1938, p. 73.
Where the revaluation did not provide the settler with a reasonable chance of success, the C.S.C. was able to provide further assistance:

In addition to the statutory equities which the settlers are to receive, the Commission is giving attention to the further equity necessary for each settler to have to enable him to remain on his holding and meet his annual commitments under conditions favourable to his success.13

Where the statutory equity was insufficient, additional equity was granted. One settler to receive additional equity was J. T. Lane of Warrong whose Revaluation Report described his 261 acre block as follows:

land consists of low grey ground, flat portion of approximately 170 acres is subject to flooding in winter and generally very badly affected with cricket pest in summer. High land consists of grey loam with outcrops of stone.14

This was not a viable farm. The C.S.C. took into account the inferior quality of Lane’s block, writing his land and improvements down from £3,711 to £2,049.15

He was then granted an extra thirteen per cent equity, in addition to the twelve per cent standard equity. The C.S.C. negotiated additional equity or lower repayments where there was no additional land available.

Settlers in poor health were sometimes given special attention during their Revaluation. Layfield Allan of Hilgay received high praise from the Revaluation Committee, however it was noted that ‘Lessee’s progress is retarded by poor

14 PROV, VPRS 5,714, Box 657, J. T. Lane, Warrong Estate, Revaluation File.
15 ibid.
‘We recommend that he receive special consideration’. His land and improvements were valued at £2,882 with a reassessed liability of £1,900. In 1942, his inspector described him as ‘a very delicate man, [whose] son does all of the work on the block’. Similarly, Hilgay settler J. L. G. Annett was described as a ‘fair settler, handicapped by indifferent health’. By the early 1940s, this was a common assessment. It is not clear whether men in ‘indifferent health’ were only ‘fair settlers’ or if their health had led to this conclusion.

Where settlers still did not ‘measure up to an average standard of efficiency ... an additional period was granted to enable them to make the necessary improvements in their methods’. In 1938, about one thousand settlers throughout Victoria were in this category. The C.S.C. acknowledged that a small percentage continued to show a ‘lack of efficiency’. These were given the benefits of the revaluation but were advised to ‘take an early opportunity to effect a sale and realise the equity which they will be given’. This was not enforced and ‘inefficient’ settlers could continue to farm their blocks.

16 PROV, VPRS 5,714, Box 2,297, L. Allan, Hilgay Estate, Revaluation file.
17 ibid., Annual Report, 6.5.42.
18 PROV, VPRS 5,714, Box 754, J. L. G. Annett, Hilgay Estate, Revaluation file.
20 ibid.
Frederick Miller of Struan still had difficulty paying his instalments after his land and improvements were revalued down from £2,499-1-3 to £1,612.22 The C.S.C. only thought Miller a ‘fair settler’ and felt that providing him with further equity was not justified. In 1938 he was described as a ‘very poor businessman - does not seem to realise the seriousness of his position’.23 In 1943, he was ‘sixty-five years of age and still struggling - lacking in business ability’.24 Miller was never going to be a ‘success’ as a farmer but the C.S.C. were still able to assist him with a comfortable retirement. He obtained approximately £3,564 when he sold his block in 1946, almost £2,000 more than its valuation nine years before.25

Lake has discussed the C.S.C.’s ‘removal of hundreds of the less “efficient” settlers from the land’.26 This did not happen in South West Victoria. The C.S.C. did identify a number of areas that were unsuitable for soldier settlement.27 These included 841 farms in the Mallee, which reverted to the Lands Department and were then leased for grazing.28 Settlers previously on this land could have been

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22 PROV, VPRS 5,714, Box 587, F Miller, Struan Estate, Revaluation File, 31.12.36.
23 *ibid.*, Annual report, 25.6.38.
24 *ibid.*, Annual report, 3.11.43.
25 *ibid.*, Revaluation File, 3.5.46.
27 Report of the Closer Settlement Commission, 1937, p. 7. This land consisted of the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Acres</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Northern Mallee</td>
<td>578,773</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other parts of the State</td>
<td>83,750</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irrigable farms</td>
<td>19,021</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
included in her figure. However, as 2,361 Victorian settlers were granted extra land, a number of men must have transferred or otherwise relinquished their blocks. After the revaluation, a number of settlers were happy to sell their farms due to advancing age or declining health. From the evidence in the Closer Settlement Commission files at the Public Records Office of Victoria, several of the surviving settlers could not be described as ‘efficient’ or even hard workers. Finally it is probable that at least some of the settlers ‘whose leases were forfeited for various reasons’ were, not inefficient but, in poor health.  

Protests at Revaluation

A minority of settlers were not satisfied with their revaluations and requested a reassessment. Clive Grummett of Elderslie wrote to the C.S.C. that

I am bitterly disappointed with my revaluation and consider it far too high. You gave us to understand that the settlers who worked their land to the best advantage during the assessment period would be given the best spin but as far as I can see the more we have improved the place, the more we have to pay for it.

Before the revaluation, Grummett owed £8,909 on his block. This was reduced to £6,521-18-11 with annual instalments of £359. He wanted the instalments to be about £280 claiming he was unable to pay more. The C.S.C. disallowed his appeal. Evidence presented to the Commission indicates that Grummett was a successful farmer. He was carrying 2,300 sheep, including 850 breeding ewes,
490 acres of the block were sown down and he was improving more land.

Grummett had top-dressed 1,000 acres that year at ninety pounds of superphosphate per acre. His balance sheet (Table 13.1) shows his financial position at the time of the appeal:

Table 13.1. Balance sheet for C. J. Grummett, Elderslie Estate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gross returns for 1936-37</th>
<th>Working Expenses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sale of wool</td>
<td>£848</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sale of 150 sheep.</td>
<td>£80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misc. Income not itemised.</td>
<td>£39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hire of two permanent workmen £250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Misc. expenses not itemised. £414</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>£967</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>£664</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: PROV, VPRS 748, Box 2,363, C. Grummett, Elderslie Estate, Evidence presented in support of his appeal over the level of Revaluation granted.

Grummett’s complaint may have contained an element of truth although his balance sheet shows his profitability. The employment of two permanent workers indicates that he had moved out of the supposedly ‘yeomen’ class of soldier settlers.

R. Stevens of Warrong had greater success when he lodged his appeal. In 1938, he was described as a ‘Good type of settler but suffers from war disabilities’. Originally, his block was valued at £3,594 and then reassessed down to £2,780, giving him equity of twenty-three per cent and annual instalments of £153. After his appeal, his liability was further reduced to £2,600 giving him twenty-eight per cent equity in his block. When Stevens applied for his Qualification Certificate in

31 Stevens had been discharged from the army with pleuritis. PROV, VPRS 5,714, Box 694, R. Stevens, Warrong Estate, Revaluation File.
1920, he was described as ‘in fair health but unable to undertake heavy work’.\textsuperscript{32}

In 1931, Stevens wrote to the C.S.B. to complain that his block was wet with a neighbour’s land draining onto it. It was reported that a whitish crust formed on the flats in the summer.\textsuperscript{33} These flats did not grow grass and became a small quagmire in the winter. Stevens’ two grounds for his appeal were his health and his flooded block. Settlers who appealed against their assessment were isolated cases and most were happy to accept their revaluation and continue farming with greater confidence than previously.

The C.S.C. emphasised in its 1937 Annual Report that the revaluation was the final concession for soldier settlers. It was noted that

\begin{quote}
The Commission wishes to place on record its firm opinion that when a settler’s liabilities have been adjusted he must recognise that no further concessions will be available whatever the circumstances may be. He should meet his commitments to the State promptly and without any abatement or make way for someone else who will do so.\textsuperscript{34}
\end{quote}

The Commissioners believed, at the time of the Revaluation, that ‘approximately 90 per cent of settlers will succeed’.\textsuperscript{35} In the Hamilton district, no settlers have been identified as ‘failures’ after this time. While an increasing number of settlers

\begin{footnotes}
\item [32] PROV, VPRS 748. Box 146, R. Stevens, Warrong Estate, Qualification Certificate documentation.
\item [33] \textit{ibid.}, lessee to C.S.B., 25.9.31. He had just lost one hundred sheep due to the flooded nature of his block. The whitish crust on the ground may have been an early appearance of salinity.
\item [34] Report of the Closer Settlement Commission, 1937, p. 8.
\item [35] \textit{ibid.}
\end{footnotes}
sold out in the 1940s and 1950s, the settler, not the administrating authority, made the decision to sell.

Change in Assessments of Soldier Settlers

From 1938 onwards, settlers attracted steadily decreasing attention from their administrating agencies and inspectors. The all-encompassing and detailed ‘pink’ forms were discontinued. A brief one page, yellow form on which the inspector wrote approximately twenty to thirty words, usually of a positive nature, replaced these. The 1943 report for Mrs G. T. Povey, Administrator of the Estate of George Thomas Povey, deceased of Struan Estate, was a typical example.

Table 13.2 Example of a settler’s report in the post Revaluation period

| Maintenance of improvements. | Well maintained. |
| Maintenance of stock and plant. | Maintained. |
| Pastures and crops. | Excellent. |
| Prospects. | Good. |
| General remarks. | Block worked by Mrs Povey’s family. Excellent quality dairy herd. One of the best worked farms in the district. |

Source. PROV VPRS 5,714. Box 662. The 1943 annual report for Mrs G. T. Povey of Struan Estate.

This report was very different to the four to six page ‘pink’ form report used previously. The questions on whether the settler had employed any labour, and

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36 PROV, VPRS 5,714, Box 662, The 1943 annual report for Mrs G. T. Povey of Struan Estate.

37 See Appendix Eight.
whether it was necessary, and how much farm work his children did, were no longer asked. The later reports were written about settlers who were expected to succeed. The ‘yellow’ forms were filled in for the next few years, and then even these rudimentary reports were abandoned. In latter years, the main information in the settlers’ files concerned annual payments, followed by a final exchange of correspondence when they wanted to sell, or pay off, the farm.

The settlers’ post-1937 personal assessments were similar to the ‘pink’ form reports of the early 1920s; they were once again seen as ‘good’ farmers. The negative assessments of the Depression period were discontinued. There are two probable reasons for this change. First, inspectors may have adopted different criteria. Initially to be a ‘trier’ was enough and many inefficient settlers were allowed to continue because they were perceived to be trying. Later this was inadequate and settlers had to be ‘efficient’. The other reason, noted previously was that it is practically impossible to be an ‘efficient’ farmer without capital. Efficiency in the Inspector’s lexicon included adopting modern farming and management techniques and improving the carrying capacity of the block. This was expensive and not justified until economic conditions improved.

The End of an Era

In the aftermath of the revaluations, a number of settlers decided to sell their blocks. Richard Price had been forty-five years of age in 1920 when he received
his Qualification Certificate. In 1938, he was in his early 60s, so he was probably planning to retire. His land and improvements were valued at £2,589, which was written down to £1,364 to ensure that he received a reasonable equity. Shortly afterwards he sold the block for £4,500, at which time he owed £1,294-7-7. Price was fortunate in that, having received a good price for his block, he could plan on a comfortable retirement.

Another settler who did well under the policies of the C.S.C. was N. M. McGilp of Warrong. At the time of the revaluation in 1938 it was noted that he had a house at Hamilton valued at £350 plus £600 on fixed deposit. He also had no debts. Irrespective of this, the £5,109 valuation on his block was subsequently revalued down to £3,950. When McGilp sold out in 1943, he received £7,096 for his block, £3,140 more than he owed the C.S.C.

Others were not so fortunate. George Robbie of Struan had been forty-one years of age when he received his Qualification Certificate. A dairy farm was constant hard work and Robbie suffered from poor health. He had invested all his capital in his block and in 1935 wrote to the C.S.C. to

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38 PROV, VPRS 748. Box 126, R. Price, Section 20, Qualification Certificate.
39 PROV, VPRS 5,714, Box 662, R. Price, Section 20, Revaluation File.
40 PROV, VPRS 748, Box 110, N. M. McGilp, Warrong Estate.
41 PROV, VPRS 5,714, Box 672, N. M. McGilp, Warrong Estate, Revaluation File, 25.10.43.
say that £800 of my wife’s private money and £600 of my own has been spent on the farm in addition to every penny which has been spent over and above living expenses.43

In the revaluation, his land and improvements were valued at £2,209, which was then reassessed down to £1,650.44 In 1941, his wife died and Robbie sold the block for £2,295.45 The couple had worked the farm for twenty-two years and invested at least £1,400 of their own money in the enterprise. Unless Robbie managed to save money privately, there would be little left to retire on after the C.S.C. was paid out. Robbie’s work over the years may not have been worth it.

A number of settlers discharged their mortgages in the 1940s and 1950s. While some wanted to sell, others, understandably, saw the opportunity to finally gain the elusive independence they had been promised when they commenced farming on their discharge from the army. In 1951, Peter Martinich was in such a sound position that he was able to send £3,439-18-7 to the Commission towards paying off his principal.46 He owed £833-1-2, which he wanted to pay before the next instalment was due. Martinich was unable make this payment as in 1953 his cows were placed under quarantine for pleuro-pneumonia.47 Finally, on the 14th of April 1955, after thirty-five years, he made his land freehold.48

43 ibid., Lessee to C.S.C., 20.5.35.
44 PROV, VPRS 5,714, Box 589, G. Robbie, Struan Estate, Revaluation File.
45 ibid., 22.9.41.
46 ibid., Lessee to C.S.C., 30.7.51.
47 ibid., Inspector’s report, 22.3.53.
48 ibid., final entry in file, 14.4.55.
Assistance of Wives and Families

As the soldier settlers grew older, the assistance provided by their wives and families became an increasingly critical factor in the success or failure of the family unit. A large number of settlers were ‘in poor health’ by the late 1930s, their wives and older children doing the majority of the work. No evidence exists in the files as to the number of adult children who stayed on the farm as cheap labour with the expectation of inheriting the block.

Lake has referred to the significant number of wives of soldier settlers who left their husbands. Evidence in the files studied suggests that this was a rare occurrence in the Hamilton Administrative District where the majority of wives worked alongside their husbands. A number of wives and families worked as hard, if not harder, than the actual returned soldiers. The wife of E. C. Siceley of Warrong wrote to the C.S.C. in 1941 because her husband had rejoined the army, leaving her in charge of the farm and between fifty and sixty dairy cows. She had hoped to continue but the work was too difficult. Her two eldest daughters, aged eighteen and eleven years, had been in hospital suffering from strain and exposure. The C.S.C. was sympathetic and arranged for her husband’s discharge from the army.

Changing Farming Practices after 1938

Changes in farming practices, leading to increased stocking rates, significantly effected productivity after 1938. Rising commodity prices and the greater

certainty of continued tenure allowed settlers to increase the use of superphosphate and continue pasture improvements. Originally, settlers could not afford to fertilise previously sown paddocks. With the extra money available after 1938, they were able to topdress their whole blocks on a regular basis. During the 1950s, the superphosphate bounty became a significant factor in encouraging the use of fertiliser.\(^50\) By 1950, Peter Martinich was milking 100 cows as well as running 2,000 sheep.\(^51\) He had between 1,300 and 1,400 acres, which twenty years before struggled to carry 800 dry sheep equivalents (DSEs).\(^52\) Now Martinich, with improved pastures, was able to run at least 1,700 DSEs in dairy cows and a minimum of 2,000 DSEs in the sheep.\(^53\)

Malcolm Sim of Squattleseamere also had a significant increase in his stocking rate. Originally allotted 242 acres, he received an extra sixty acres in 1937.\(^54\) Prior to this, Sim had been in financial difficulties because he had been allocated a wet block. In 1936, his estimated carrying capacity was 400 dry sheep\(^55\) and between


\[\text{\footnotesize\(51\) P. Martinich, \textit{op. cit.}, Inspector’s report, 30.6.50.}\]

\[\text{\footnotesize\(52\) See Appendix one. Glossary.}\]

\[\text{\footnotesize\(53\) The file does not state whether the sheep were ewes or wethers. An assumption is made that they were all wethers which gives a figure of 2,000 DSEs. (One wether = One DSE) A conservative figure has been taken for the dairy cows as there is no indication as to the breed. Different breeds have different DSE rates, because of the size differences.}\]

\[\text{\footnotesize\(54\) PROV, VPRS 748. Box 141, Malcolm Sim, Squattleseamere Estate, 1.4.37.}\]

\[\text{\footnotesize\(55\) Ie. wethers.}\]
ten and fifteen dairy cows.\textsuperscript{56} By 1944, it was reported that he was running 900
grown sheep, 600 lambs, seven dairy cows and twelve additional grown cattle.\textsuperscript{57}

In 1945, his Inspector made the additional comment that the ‘Lessee has greatly
developed block’.\textsuperscript{58} To have almost doubled his carrying capacity in less than ten
years provides a vivid illustration of what could be done when settlers had the
money to develop and regularly fertilise their pastures.

\textit{The Post War Rural Boom}

By 1945, economic conditions had improved considerably for the surviving
soldier settlers. The improved prices during and after World War Two helped
soldier settlers keep ahead of their instalments and continue to increase the
carrying capacity of their blocks.\textsuperscript{59} Wally Douglas, and other Elderslie soldier
settlers in the local sub-branch of the RSL, had enough confidence in the future to
make a submission to the Minister of Lands in order to have additional soldier
settlement implemented in the district after World War Two.\textsuperscript{60} His submission
shows the productivity increases that had been made.

\begin{quote}
Before sub-division for soldier settlement, Elderslie station shore 250 bales of
wool and there were no sheep for sale. The first wool clip after Elderslie had been
taken over by 35 soldier settlers aggregated 350 bales or 10 bales per flock. … By
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{56} PROV, VPRS 748. Box 14, Malcolm Sim, Squattleseamere Estate, ‘pink’ form report. 15.7.36.

\textsuperscript{57} \textit{ibid.}, 1944, Annual report.

\textsuperscript{58} \textit{ibid.}, 1945, Annual report.

\textsuperscript{59} See Appendix seven for stock prices over the life of the scheme.

\textsuperscript{60} Neale, \textit{op. cit.}, 1984. pp. 98 – 99.
1925 – after 4 years of settlement, the average clip per block had risen to 14 bales. After that period there was a gradual improvement in production until the conditions of settlers were adjusted in 1935. Since then conditions are such that settlers were in a position to financially a reasonable supply of superphosphate.61

Douglas noted the great response of introduced pastures (mainly subterranean clover) to regular applications of superphosphate which had led to increases of up to 400 per cent in the stocking rate. In 1945, the settlers on the Estate produced 1,750 bales of wool and in 1944 over 12,000 surplus sheep and lambs were sold off Elderslie blocks. This increase in productivity may have been even greater if rationing of superphosphate had not occurred in 1941.62

In 1948, Inspector Hindhaugh, reporting on Dave Pahl, concluded that the ‘High prices and good returns have given this settler the extra finance needed to make further improvements’.63 The nitrogen fixing qualities of clovers were becoming apparent by the late 1940s. One per cent perennial clover in a pasture will release five kilograms of nitrogen per hectare into the surrounding soil. This occurs when the plant dies off in early summer. The nitrogen then further adds to the fertility of the soil. The increase in the clover content of pastures, coupled with the continuing use of superphosphates, led to even greater production levels. This was not restricted to soldier settlers in South West Victoria but was a common occurrence throughout the State. In 1964, the noted agricultural scientist and

61 ibid.
62 ibid.
Waite Professor of Agriculture\textsuperscript{64}, Colin Donald noted that ‘the use of fertilised leguminous pastures stands as the greatest factor of favourable environmental change in our agriculture since first settlement’.\textsuperscript{65}

Another factor to influence profitability in the Hamilton region was the biological control of one of the most economically and ecologically damaging pests to be imported into Australia. In the early 1950s, the introduction of myxomatosis led to a reduction of over ninety per cent in the rabbit population. Previously, soldier settlers had spent up to one day per week on, marginally successful, rabbit control.\textsuperscript{66} One report suggested that 4,000 rabbits would eat as much as seventy dairy cows.\textsuperscript{67} The brief reports and limited correspondence between settlers and the Closer Settlement Commission after 1938 have meant that there is no mention in the files of the benefits of ‘myxo’. This is a pity as it would be useful to ascertain the extra production attainable after the rabbits were eradicated. Myxomatosis greatly reduced pasture and crop losses, which further increased the carrying capacity of the blocks.\textsuperscript{68}

\textsuperscript{64} At the University of Adelaide.

\textsuperscript{65} Donald, \textit{op. cit.}, 1964, p. 189.

\textsuperscript{66} Dingle, \textit{op. cit.}, 1984, p. 243.

\textsuperscript{67} \textit{ibid.}

The wool ‘boom’ of the early 1950s and the generally buoyant prices for agricultural commodities helped soldier settlers from both the First and Second World Wars. (Figure 14.1) The particularly high figure for the pastoral industries was influenced by the short period during the early 1950s when merino wool was sold for up to a ‘a pound a pound’.69 The ‘boom’ helped the earlier settlers to make further improvements and accumulate financial reserves.

Max Neale has estimated that by 1950, there were an approximately 70,000 sheep and 1,000 head of cattle in the Elderslie district.70 He notes that the ‘transition from small settler status to “gentleman farmer” was rapidly brought about by the wool boom’ and that most ‘properties employed at least one full time employee

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69 For a short period during the early 1950s a number of farmers were able to sell their wool for £1 per one pound weight.

per 1,000 acres’.71 The independence the men had been promised when they took
up their blocks had finally arrived.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided an opportunity to assess the long-term effects of the
Closer Settlement Commission. Did it fulfil the wishes of its political masters
who wanted it to have the ‘brutality’ to stop the losses of soldier settlement and
insist on the ‘fulfilment of obligations entered into’?72 Alternatively, did it make a
concerted effort to help as many soldier settlers as possible succeed? The
evidence in the Hamilton district suggests the latter, although this conclusion
might be challenged.73 The C.S.C. made the expensive decisions that put soldier
settlement on a sound footing, benefiting both the State and the settlers.

The revaluation clearly showed that the soldier settlers’ earlier fears about the
Closer Settlement Commission had been unfounded. The C.S.C. was genuine in
its attempt to help them to ‘succeed’. The significance of the revaluation was
twofold. Firstly, participating soldier settlers gained a sizeable reduction in the
amount owing on their blocks, reduced instalments and increased time to pay for
their blocks. Secondly, they were guaranteed a reasonable equity in their blocks.

After 1938, soldier settlers had more security (and less worry) than at any time in

71 ibid., p. 115.
73 Lake has been more critical in her assessment of the Closer Settlement Commission,
concluding that “The tough “business-like” approach has resulted in the removal of
hundreds of the less efficient settler from the land”. ibid., p. 236.
their previous farming careers. The boom in agriculture during the early 1950s
came too late for older settlers to make money out of farming. However, it
provided a buoyant property market for those who wanted to sell. The revaluation
was a pyrrhic victory for numerous soldier settlers. Just when success became
feasible, their working lives were coming to an end. Settlers who had families to
take over the blocks had the satisfaction of seeing their children gain security and
relative prosperity.
Chapter Fourteen

Conclusion

of all the foolish policies of land settlement which have been advocated for
general application in many parts of Australia, the endeavour to create a system
of small-scale farming is probably the most stupid.

S. M. Wadham.1

Introduction

The focus of this thesis has been soldier settlement after World War One in South
West Victoria with particular emphasis on the farming processes involved. In
Section Two: Claiming their Reward and Section Three: The Reward goes Sour,
two concurrent themes have been addressed. The first concerns the settlers’
interaction with their physical environment and the impact this had on their
subsequent success or failure. The second addressed the personal factors, which
affected their fortunes. These included the individual settler’s health, capital,
experience and interaction with the local inspector. In addition, the problems
caused by the continually depressed commodity markets have been analysed. In
section Four: The Reward gets Reassessed, the focus shifted to the 1930s
experience and the administrative changes initiated by the Closer Settlement
Commission. These changes have been identified as critical factors in the success
of the remaining settlers.

1 S. M. Wadham, ‘Difficulties of small scale farming in Australia’. In G. L. Wood (ed)
Australia, its Resources and Development, Macmillan, New York, 1947, p. 139.
While alternative forms of repatriation to soldier settlement were discussed, they were not seriously considered. In hindsight, it may have been wise for Australia to widen its manufacturing base; however, this would have ignored the larger political considerations of Empire. The British view of the Imperial relationship was plain. ‘Australians exported food and raw materials to Britain while Britain exported population, capital and manufactured goods to Australia’. It was recognised that manufacturing industry could only exist artificially with tariff protection. Even with tariffs, domestic manufacturers had increasing difficulty competing with imports because of the growing divergence between local and overseas prices. Therefore, there was little official interest in value adding to exports or cutting down on imports by manufacturing. Australia had traditionally embraced the concept of rural development as a path to national prosperity. Placing returned soldiers on small farms was a natural extension of this ideology.

For numerous returned men, there was no alternative. In Victoria, the 11,000 returned men who became soldier settlers needed jobs and the non-farming sectors were unlikely to take up the additional labour. They had to be included in the post-war economy and this was always likely to require Government intervention.

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2 Lake *op. cit.*, 1987, pp. 10 – 11.
Part of the philosophy surrounding soldier settlement was explained by the Minister for Repatriation, Senator Edward Millen during planning for the scheme. Millen explained to prospective soldier settlers that ‘Repatriation cannot make you successful, but it can provide you with the means of making yourself successful’. The underlying message was that, if settlers were efficient, worked hard and took advantage of their opportunities, the government would provide the ‘means’ to enable them to succeed. This could be construed as denoting a contract between the Commonwealth government and the settlers. As such, each party had an obligation to the other. While the settlers were forced to do the hard work, the administration, at least in the initial stages, did not fulfil their part of the contract. They failed to provide sufficient land of adequate quality, necessary infrastructure such as roads and bridges, an economic climate conducive to rural prosperity and training for inexperienced soldier settlers. Therefore, many of the later changes in the legislation governing soldier settlement should be seen as attempts by the various governments to fulfil their obligations to returned soldiers. In the circumstances, most settlers had only limited responsibility for their inability to farm profitably, and meet their commitments.

The planners of soldier settlement suffered from misconceptions about the realities of the situation. One of the more unfortunate beliefs of the early twentieth century was that farming was ‘easy’. The Rural Reconstruction

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Commission, set up during World War Two to plan post-war reconstruction, saw this as one of the major problems with the earlier scheme:

A considerable part of the new farming of 1920-1930 had been based on the assumption that farming is easy … and that hard work alone will enable a farmer to succeed. … Dairy farms had been established which were too small to enable a man to earn his living … Many of these mistakes in planning would have been avoided if the economics of agricultural production had been understood when the settlements had been inaugurated.7

Farming in Australia has traditionally been a hard and often heart-breaking occupation. Increasingly farmers would also require technical and management skills. Soldier settlers were rarely given the opportunity to gain this expertise.

Soldier settlement started during a period when E. J. Brady, Thomas Cherry and others were advocating an idyllic future in which the ‘unlimited creativity of mankind’8 would help create ‘Australia Unlimited’. Their optimism helped to persuade the planners of soldier settlement that much of Victoria was suitable for intensive farming. Unfortunately, the optimism was misplaced. Similarly, there was a common, although often erroneous, belief that returned soldiers would make ideal farmers.

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Men returning from World War One were initially feted and assured that Australia was a ‘land fit for heroes’. Soldier settlers were not the larger than life heroes of ANZAC legend but young men, often in poor health, many with inadequate experience on the land, and little or no capital. They wanted to become farmers and were prepared to put a brave face on their ailments in order to realise their dream. Returned soldiers had been through a traumatic experience, which they would have to live with for the rest of their lives. They were in need of understanding and returned to a country and population with no conception of what they had endured. Comparisons can be drawn between the psychological state of these men and those of the Vietnam veterans of the 1960s and early 1970s. In both cases, there was also a feeling in the community that the men should just go back to their old lives as quietly as possible.

Soldier settlement has traditionally been seen as a failure and, in Victoria, slightly over half the settlers had left by 1938. On a purely economic basis, the scheme was a financial disaster for both the Commonwealth and Victorian governments and ultimately the taxpayers. However, what is failure as it applied to the soldier settlers on their blocks? Edmonds has provided a simple but useful definition of success and failure as it applied to small farmers in the Wimmera during the 1920s and 1930s.

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9 The C.S.C Supplementary Report, year ended 30 June 1938, VPP, 1938, p. 4.
Success was being able to carry on as a farmer. Failure was being unable to do so. … They came to farm. If they and their families could carry on farming then this was success.  

This could be applied to the majority of soldier settlers prior to the appointment of the Closer Settlement Commission. They had no hope of material success or meeting their financial commitments to the Closer Settlement Board. Therefore all they could do was continue to farm in the expectation that conditions would improve.

Farming has always been a high-risk occupation and soldier settlement commenced shortly before the start of two of the most difficult decades for agriculture in Australia’s history. Even established farmers, with experience, capital reserves and comfortable levels of equity in their properties, found the 1920s and 30s difficult. Soldier settlers had none of these advantages, yet almost half managed to remain in occupation until 1938. When the relevant factors which affected the fortunes of the men are examined, to refer to them as ‘failures’ seems an unnecessarily harsh epitaph.

Critical factors in the success or failure of the men

Several key factors have been identified as necessary before any soldier settler could succeed. The most important was the will to survive. The term, ‘the will to survive’ is used for a particular reason. Numerous settlers, who were given no hope of survival by their inspectors, Inquiry Boards and the C.S.B., were able to

\[11\] ibid., p. 97.
remain in occupation. During their struggle, they had to endure poverty, physical hardship, falling markets, heavy stock losses, and insults from the C.S.B., and the press. Another major factor was the health of the soldier settler and his family. Unfortunately, the stresses of life on a soldier settlement block affected more than just the actual settler and several had to leave because of the sickness of their wives and children. The will to survive and continuing good health were far more important than the often cited, lack of capital and farming experience although less important than market prices and the quality of the land. A significant number who started without either capital or experience managed to succeed. Initially the majority of soldier settlers did not have enough land. However, if they were able to survive until the early 1930s, there was a reasonable chance that additional acreage would be allocated.

**Environmental factors**

Soldier settlement commenced at a critical time in the nation’s rural history. The traditional ‘extractive’\(^{12}\) farming system, which had impoverished the soil, was ending and the alternatives were expensive. Soldier settlers had to contend with a legacy of eighty years of neglect of the grasslands of Victoria. Previous farming methods had led to soil degradation, which would have to be addressed. Depressed rural commodity prices, coupled with settlers’ financial commitments and inadequate acreages, made this difficult and restricted their ability to farm

their land on economic and scientific lines. However, when economic conditions improved in the 1940s and 1950s, those on blocks with a regular superphosphate history were well placed to maximise their profits.

The changes in farming practices, which were necessitated by the small blocks, directly and indirectly led to a significant increase in animal diseases. The majority of farmers in the region faced high levels of animal mortality. Unfortunately, most soldier settlers did not have the financial resources to compensate for these losses from diseases.

Economic Factors

Soldier settlers’ lack of financial reserves were such that a downturn in commodity prices or a below average season was potentially fatal. Lomas has noted that ‘to claim that depressed markets and unproductive seasons were really culpable is naïve; both were permanent elements in rural production …’. While this statement is accurate, small farmers were often close to the break-even point and rarely had reserves to carry them through poor years. In these circumstances, ‘depressed markets and unproductive seasons’ could lead to failure within a short time. Once again, the ‘will to survive’ became important.

There was a continuing dichotomy between the C.S.B. and settlers as to the first priority of the latter. Settlers took the view that their first, and most important,
task was to develop their blocks. The C.S.B. wanted them to pay for their holding. The success of the post World War Two scheme suggests that the settlers were right. Unlike the latter scheme, the World War One settlers were expected to run profitable enterprises before blocks had been sufficiently developed. Irrespective of the priorities, the rapid decline in agricultural commodity prices during the early 1920s meant that the argument was largely academic. Returns were insufficient for settlers to meet their commitments to the C.S.B., let alone develop their farm and meet personal expenses.

Often the allocation of a less than economic farming unit meant that the soldier settler was likely to be unviable. However, even when a small farm was viable, the settler was unlikely to experience the economies of scale enjoyed by his larger neighbours. Farmers with five or twenty-five cows would need similar dairies, yards and pigsties.

**Personal factors**

It has been concluded that a significant number who were suffering from the effects of their war service should not have been allocated blocks in the first place. While it was recognised that urban returned soldiers generally could not work as hard as men who had not gone to the war, this was not taken into account when assessing soldier settlers’ working ability.\(^{14}\) Their health deteriorated over

time and there has been research that supports the view that returned men died prematurely.\textsuperscript{15} Over the life of the scheme, a number of soldier settlers suffered from the delayed effects of their ordeal in the trenches.

Inexperience has traditionally been seen as a significant factor in the large number of failures.\textsuperscript{16} Farming was changing and traditional farming knowledge did not necessarily have answers to the problems faced by soldier settlers. Inspectors were appointed to guide them and they must bear part of the blame for inappropriate decisions. It is probable that the inspectors did not recognise all the ramifications of their instructions to the men. In addition, practical, although not necessarily managerial, experience would be gained on the block. Inexperience was not as important a factor as previously thought. While it was convenient for the C.S.B. to blame settlers’ inexperience for their failure, other factors were more important.

The issue of soldier settlers having insufficient capital was examined and it was also found to be largely irrelevant as a cause of failure. Settlers with capital spent it on improving their blocks, whereas those who did not have the capital received higher advances or went without the capital improvements. The end result was the same, when settlers were due to make their first payments to the C.S.B., the

\textsuperscript{15} Professor Peter Dennis (School of History, UNSW Australian Defence Force Academy Canberra) has done some preliminary work into the premature deaths of returned men after World War One and considers that significant numbers died during their 30s and 40s. (E-mail discussion with Professor Dennis, 17.5.2000.)

\textsuperscript{16} Pike, \textit{op. cit.}, 1929, p. 24.
money was unavailable. Later it was recognised by the settlers that the greater the level of indebtedness, the greater the concessions granted. Therefore, there were advantages in being in arrears with payments to the C.S.B. The issue of starting capital was insignificant compared to the settler’s ability to make a profit from his block and, unfortunately, this was often impossible. However, settlers who started with some capital and spent it on tangible improvements like their home, sheds and fences would probably have built up deeper emotional ties with the block and thus a greater reluctance to walk away.17

Influence of the Closer Settlement Commission

While the environmental, economic and physical problems encountered by soldier settlers imposed constraints on their progress, it was not until the appointment of the Closer Settlement Commission in 1932 that the majority had any chance of success. The C.S.C. had two main aims, firstly that ‘the great majority of settlers may have a reasonable expectation of a successful outcome of their life’s work’. After what they had endured, both at the war and on their blocks, this was only reasonable. As some returned men had prophesied at the end of the war, as the memory of the conflict faded, they were treated increasingly badly. The second aim of the C.S.C. was that the ‘State may be relieved of the responsibility of providing more money to keep the settlers on the land’.18 The C.S.C. had been

appointed to accomplish this task. Fortunately for the settlers, they succeeded in both.

The administrative changes initiated by the C.S.C. were of critical importance. For the first time it was recognised that settlers’ abilities to meet their commitments were affected by external factors. Once this crucial fact was acknowledged, the C.S.C. assisted the men by adjusting their instalments downwards to reflect their ability to pay. The Commission also recognised that settlers with uneconomically sized blocks had no hope of success. Wherever possible, holdings were built up to provide viable farms.

Finally, the C.S.C. carried out a revaluation of every soldier settlement block in the State. In recognition of the fact that blocks had initially been overvalued, mortgages were reduced and new, and extended, terms were written into the contracts. In South West Victoria at least, the C.S.C. was correct in its assessment that soldier settlers would, in the future, be able to succeed by their own endeavours.

The philosophy of the Commission was similar to that expressed by Senator Edward Millen regarding the provision of the means for settlers to succeed. While the C.S.C. provided a realistic administrative structure, settlers were also able to take advantage of a sustained rise in commodity prices. Finally, they had

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funds for farm development. Donald has noted that there was a sixty per cent increase in stock numbers between 1947 and 1963.\(^\text{20}\) He attributed forty-eight per cent of this increase to pasture improvement while the other fifty-two per cent was due to other factors including ‘myxomatosis, disease control, fodder conservation, fencing, watering, irrigation, improved transport and so on’. Degraded pastures, rabbits and animal diseases were all identified as significant physical constraints on settlers’ abilities to successfully farm their blocks.

*Positive aspects of soldier settlement*

This thesis in its analysis of the problems faced by soldier settlers in South West Victoria has reached critical conclusions regarding the scheme. Irrespective of Professor S. M. Wadham’s assessment noted above, soldier settlement had a significant and positive long-term effect on the region. Where the C.S.B. acquired land and an Estate was established, a new community was formed and the landscape changed permanently. If the settler failed, his block was allocated to another settler or small farmer; it did not revert to the previous owner. In the Western District, the average size of the new blocks was 220 hectares, which for the most part was less than thirty-nine per cent of the size of the previous holdings.\(^\text{21}\)

\(^{20}\) Donald, *op. cit.*, 1964, p. 189.

Wadham ignored the considerable benefits that flowed, either directly, or indirectly, from soldier settlement. There was additional money in circulation from the sale of land, livestock and farming requisites. The railways carried additional freight. Farm implement manufacturing was boosted due to increased demand and a shortage of imports in the immediate post war period.\textsuperscript{22} The extra farms ensured that a greater network of roads crossed the region. At least fifteen new schools were provided for the settlers’ children.\textsuperscript{23} Few of these small schools have survived until the present day, but they served a need at that time and provided a focal point for the district.\textsuperscript{24} Soldier settlers were rarely given credit for the stimulus they gave to the local economy.

\textit{World War Two Soldier Settlement}

During the second World War, the problem of how to repatriate returned soldiers arose again. The story of what happened with respect to soldier settlement after World War Two is a part of this story as the administration at last learnt the lessons that had been ignored in the transition from the pre-war closer settlement schemes to soldier settlement.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{22} Report of the Closer Settlement Board for the period from 1st July 1924 to 31st of December, 1925, \textit{VPP}, 1926, p. 7.
\item \textsuperscript{24} In country districts, schools have traditionally become community centres, used for meetings and social events as well as education.
\end{itemize}
In 1943, the Commonwealth appointed a Rural Reconstruction Commission to advise on policies for the rural sector, including another soldier settlement scheme. As preparation for this work, the Commission carried out a major national inquiry. Evidence was collected at 202 formal sessions and from 808 witnesses and its report came out in stages from January 1944 to August 1946. The first report summed up the current state of the nation’s farmers:

Perhaps an apt picture of many farmers in 1943 is that of very tired men worried by the years of difficulty, perplexed by doubts about their future, but grimly carrying on with the task of the day.

Irrespective of this gloomy assessment, the Rural Reconstruction Commission went ahead with planning for the second wave of soldier settlement.

The economic historians Butlin and Schedvin conclude that ‘the great strength of post-1945 soldier settlement was the mood of pessimism, which guided its preparation’. The World War One scheme had been launched in an atmosphere of unsustainable optimism; the Rural Reconstruction Commission was more cautious.

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Aging soldier settlers became active during the planning phase. They were determined that the new generation of returned men should receive a better reward for serving their country than they had experienced. The World War One ‘diggers’ were interested in two main areas: ‘proper care and rehabilitation for servicemen who were wounded or disabled and well-planned soldier settlement’. The greater success of the latter scheme was an ongoing legacy of the World War One settlers’ understanding of the problems surrounding their own undertaking.

The Rural Reconstruction Commission concluded that soldier settlement should be planned with the long-term prospects for international trade, national nutrition policies and a continuous increase in the Australian population in mind, not with the expectation of a short-term post war boom. The Commission did not want to repeat the mistakes of the previous scheme and the 1945 War Service Land Settlement Agreement was constructed accordingly. The Agreement stated that settlement should only be undertaken where the prospects for success were reasonably sound and the number of men settled should be determined by the number of suitable farms not, as in the case of the earlier scheme, by the number

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29 ibid., p. 18.
30 ibid.
32 ibid., pp. 34-35.
of applicants. The size of farms should be large enough to allow settlers and their families to operate efficiently and maintain a realistic standard of living. Again, capital was not required but it was expected that settlers put any capital they possessed into reducing their settlement liabilities. Adequate technical advice and guidance were also made available. Importantly, settlers were not expected to make any payments until the farm was developed to the point where it was economically possible to do so. \(^\text{33}\) The terms provided for soldier settlers were two per cent interest plus principal, payable over fifty-five years. Contrast this to settlers after the First World War who were charged ‘not more than five per cent interest on the extended payments for his land, and on any advances that may be made to him’. \(^\text{34}\)

The two per cent interest rate was set for a particular reason. During the planning for the scheme, the chairman of the Soldier Settlement Commission noted that the historical pattern of farm ownership in Victoria saw farms tending to change hands every fifteen years or so and he believed that soldier settlement would follow this course. Therefore, loans would be paid off ahead of time. \(^\text{35}\) This did not always happen as numerous soldier settlers and later their sons, including the author of this thesis, were able to buy extra land while continuing to pay off the

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\(^{33}\) ibid., pp. 38-39.

\(^{34}\) Royal Commission into Soldier Settlement, 1925, p. 7.

original block at minimal interest.\textsuperscript{36} The chairman was not planning to describe a soldier settler who sold his block after a few years as a failure.

Land was purchased at 1942 values thus protecting settlers from the inflationary pressures inherent in the first scheme. Any write-offs in the value of land or equipment were carried out at the outset rather than in later years when settlers were in financial difficulties.\textsuperscript{37} In that way, every settler was placed on an equal footing from the outset. A survey of the soldier settlement estates in the approximate area covered by the Hamilton Administrative District reveals that 665 returned men were prepared to take up the challenge and become soldier settlers after World War Two. This was even more than were settled in the previous scheme.

In an important difference to the earlier scheme, equal concessions were granted to all settlers from the outset. Therefore, the disputes over ‘slackers’ and ‘misfits’ gaining assistance at the expense of hard working settlers could not arise. All settlers had the same opportunity to ‘make good’. There were still settlers who failed through a variety of, usually personal, reasons but these were in the minority. In South West Victoria, the latter scheme was a success.

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\textsuperscript{36} My father was one of six soldier settlers on Mageppa estate. They took up their blocks in May 1952. In 2002, three of the six blocks are still in the hands of the original families and only one settler on the estate did not increase the size of his property. The latter settler had no sons to inherit the block.

\textsuperscript{37} \textit{ibid.}, pp. 46-47.
Future research

This thesis has provided insights into selected aspects of soldier settlement in one region of Victoria. There are still areas where future research could be undertaken. It would be interesting to compare the settlers’ interaction with their environment with that in other regions of Victoria, Australia, and other dominion countries in which soldier settlement was an important part of the repatriation of returned soldiers after World War One.

The issue of gender, as it relates to soldier settlement, has been examined by Marilyn Lake.38 In addition the lives of single women on Victorian farms have been studied by Kathryn Hunter.39 Unfortunately, in the files studied for this thesis, the wives and families are for the most part, mentioned only sporadically. Were they slaves or helpmates? The brief evidence available suggests the latter but this hypothesis is, through necessity, only tentative. More work is still needed in this area perhaps though a detailed study of women’s role in the decision-making process, their perceptions of self in the light of the conflicting messages being received on the role of women in the home, and through their involvement in women’s organisations.40


Another area of interest concerns the impact of the wool boom of the 1950s on rural communities. This boom enabled historically poor farmers to suddenly become wealthy. Although the extremely high prices were temporary, they heralded the start of a long boom in Australian agriculture that continued through much of the 1950s and 1960s. It would be useful to provide a detailed study of the sons of soldier settlers (and small farmers in general) to ascertain how they coped with this boom and with the inevitable decline, which followed in the early 1970s.

Should Soldier Settlers be Remembered as Failures?

Finally, does the fact that slightly more than half the soldier settlers left the land by 1938 denote failure? The political imperatives of the time dictated the urgency with which land was purchased, settlers selected and estates established. Lake admits that the settlers gained an ideological victory during the 1930s but concludes that ‘this ideological victory was probably of little moment to the failed soldier settler, for his life and that of his generation [were] finished’.\(^\text{41}\) The forty-nine per cent of settlers who survived into the post-revaluation period are dismissed with the comment that ‘a few thousand were maintained in place by financial concessions’.\(^\text{42}\) This perfunctory assessment of the surviving soldier settlers is unwarranted and denigrates their considerable achievement. In the light


\(^{42}\) \textit{ibid.}, p. 235.
of the physical, environmental, and economic reverses faced by the men, it is a mark of their resilience and courage that almost half were able to survive.

In his study of social development in a small rural community, Edmonds notes that in the Clear Lake district, (Wimmera) eighty selectors failed in order to produce a community of about fifteen farms and a township. He describes this as ‘moderately successful’.\textsuperscript{43} This ratio makes the forty-nine percent of soldier settlers who managed to survive seem very successful indeed.

Farming has always been a long-term business. Farmers often embark on developmental projects, which take many years to come to fruition. Even if a soldier settler made little money in his own lifetime, he would be more likely to see himself as a success if he was able to hand the block on to his children in a reasonably sound condition.\textsuperscript{44}

It may be that politicians, the press, the C.S.B. and the settlers were all slaves to an ideal. An ideal, which held that the Western District was suitable, in its less than virgin state, for small farming. This study has shown that the region needed a considerable amount of development before small farming became viable. Over time it did become viable for many soldier settlers and their descendants. In the 2000s suggestions continue to be made that ‘small farming’ is finished and that

\textsuperscript{43} Edmonds, \textit{op. cit.}, 1974. p. 133

\textsuperscript{44} For an example see PROV VRPS Series 5714, Box 668, D. Pahl, Elderslie Estate. In the early 1950s he was having slight strokes and wanted to transfer the land to his sons before he died.
farmers should ‘get big or get out’. The issue is unlikely to be resolved in the short term as numerous small farmers, including this writer, continue to work off-farm for at least part of the year.

E. H. Carr has described the ‘delayed achievement’, which can occur in human endeavour. This provides a fitting epitaph to the final chapter of soldier settlement after World War One.

History recognises what I may call “delayed achievement”: the apparent failures of today may have turned out to have made a vital contribution to the achievements of tomorrow – prophets born before their time.45

While this thesis has not suggested that soldier settlers made a ‘vital contribution’ to the history of the region or that they were ‘prophets born before their time’, they were men whose achievements were often not recognised within their own life-times. In many cases, they were able to turn large, often poorly managed, and run down, estates into productive farms. In the subsequent years their presence helped to permanently change the landscape of Victoria, indirectly helping to increase the wealth and prosperity of the nation.

45 Carr, op. cit., 1964, p. 129.
Appendix One

Glossary

*Annual*: A plant, the seed of which germinates at the start of the growing season, produces seed by the end of the growing season and dies at the end of the season. Examples include sub clover, cape weed, barley grass.

*Bovine Mastitis*: Inflammation of the udder. Results principally from infection from micro-organisms. Probably the most serious disease for dairy farmers throughout the world. Reduces milk production by permanent damage to the udder, increases the bacterial count of the milk so that it is rejected by public health authorities, lowers the butterfat by as much as 20% and reduces the amount of milk sugar and casein making cows unprofitable for dairy purposes. Occasionally causes mortality.

*Brucellosis*: Contagious abortion. It is spread through a vaginal discharge and causes the cow to abort usually after the fifth month of pregnancy. Can be caught by humans and in this form is known as *Undulant fever*.

*Cash flow*: the movement of cash in and cash out of an enterprise or whole farm.

*Cast-for-age*: (cfa) a reject animal that is past its economic life for particular conditions. Usually refers to sheep.

*Cereals*: Crops including wheat, oats, and barley.

*Choppers*: Aged, often poor quality, cattle only suitable for the grinding meat trade.

*C.S.B.*: Closer Settlement Board. The body which administered soldier settlement in Victoria from its inception until 1933. The C.S.B. was under direct ministerial control and therefore was perceived to be liable to political interference on behalf of struggling soldier settlers.

*C.S.C.*: Closer Settlement Commission. This was a ministerially independent body set up to administer soldier settlement in Victoria between 1933 and 1938.

*Cows “drying off”*: Refers to the reduction and subsequent cessation of the milk supply. In many cases due to inadequate nutrition on soldier settlement blocks.
**Cripples**: Disease caused by phosphorus deficiency. Early effects are retarded growth, poor condition, low milk yield, reduced fertility leading to decreased calf drop, lameness and short gait. Bones become brittle and break easily [Osteomalacia]. Mortality may occur in dry periods. Sufferers have been known to eat old bones and rabbit carcases. The latter can lead to attacks of botulism.

**Cycle**: Period in which the animal is fertile and can get pregnant.

**DSE**: Dry Sheep Equivalent. The common denominator used when calculating and comparing stocking rates. The feed requirements of each class of livestock is estimated in relation to the number of “dry” sheep, ie wethers, that can be carried in its stead. Comparisons are based on the feed required by one forty-five kilogram wether, which remains at this weight throughout the year, for one year. Comparisons commonly used are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>DSE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Merino Ewe</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crossbred Ewe</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rams</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All other sheep</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dairy Cows dry maintaining weight</td>
<td>7-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breeding beef cow and calf</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weaner cattle</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulls</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heifers and steers</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dairy Cows. Lactating maintaining weight at peak milk production.</td>
<td>22-28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


NB. The variance in dairy cows is due to the size and breed of the cows. The difference between the food requirements of a dry and a lactating cow illustrate the heavy nutritional requirements due to milk production.

**Digestibility**: The proportion of the feed eaten by the stock which is retained in their body to be used to keep them alive, grow a foetus, produce milk, grow meat or wool. Expressed as a percentage, 45% is classed as very low and 85% as very high. High quality clover based pastures in the spring are of high digestibility while dry grass during the summer is of low digestibility.

**Farm Inputs**: The materials needed to establish and carry on farming on a soldier settlement block.

**Footrot**: A highly contagious disease of sheep that can cause lameness and reduced production in infected animals. Footrot is caused by infection of the deep layers of the horn of the sheep's hoof by the bacteria *Dichelobacter nodosus*.
(previously *Bacteroides nodosus*). The symptoms of footrot include severe lameness in affected feet and a characteristic, foul-smelling exudate associated with the lesions. Due to its highly contagious nature, there are often many animals affected. In the first stages of the illness, animals can become lame very quickly and will lose weight and production (such as decreased milk from lactating ewes, reduced fertility, reduced wool growth and quality).

*Gross margins:* Refers to the difference between the gross income and the variable costs, the latter being costs which change according to the size of the activity, for example: superphosphate, seed. Gross margin = Gross revenue - Variable Cost. In the short term, farm profits can be increased by increasing the size of the farm enterprise, providing the additional gross returns from this expansion exceed the variable costs associated with it.

*Home Maintenance Area.* An area which, when used for the purpose for which it is reasonably fitted, would be sufficient for the maintenance in average seasons and circumstances of the average family.

*Hoven:* Bloat, or distension of the rumen with gas, is a common complaint in cattle. It occurs when animals eat easily fermentable food to which they are not accustomed, for example, wet clover and leguminous crops.

*Impaction:* Condition due to food containing a high proportion of starches or sugars being eaten by cattle which are not accustomed to having these feeds in large quantities. The sugars and starches are broken down in the rumen (paunch) to acids and other toxic substances. The acids damage the lining of the rumen and allow absorption into the bloodstream of the toxins in the rumenal fluid. The mortality rate from this condition is high.

*Lactation:* The secretion and yielding of milk by female mammals after giving birth.

*Leaching:* Water percolating or moving through the soil and removing soluble materials, particularly nutrients.

*Licks:* Blocks containing salt and other chemical compounds placed in the paddock for stock to lick. They are primarily used to address nutrient deficiencies.
**Liens:** A signed document which gave the C.S.B. the legal right to the proceeds of the settlers’ account sales towards reducing their debts.

**Legume (Fabales):** Although approximately coeval (contemporary) with the grass family (Poaceae), the legume family is the most important of any in the production of food for humans and livestock, as well as in the production of industrial products. Because they develop bacteria-harbouring root nodules that maintain the nitrogen balance in the soil, which is necessary for plant growth, the legumes are also an essential element in nature and in agriculture. Legumes are perhaps best known by their more common cultivated names, such as peas, beans, soybeans, peanuts (groundnuts), lucerne, and clover. In the context of this research study, the word legume will usually refer to clover.

**Light ground:** Ground of poor fertility, often sandy, and of low carrying capacity.

**Maintenance ration:** A ration sufficient to maintain but not provide for any increase in the weight of the animal.

**Mixed farming:** In the Western District usually a combination of dairying and sheep/cropping or sheep combined with cropping.

**Oestrus:** The period in the sexual cycle of female mammals, except the higher primates, during which they are on heat. i.e. ready to accept a male and to mate. One or more periods of oestrus may occur during the breeding season of a species.

‘**Off farm’ income:** Income received from outside the environs of the farm.

**Pasture cultivars:** These are pasture species including subterranean clover, ryegrass and phalaris.

‘**Pink’ Form report:** Forms filled out by inspectors concerning the progress of individual soldier settlers. For an example of a typical report see Appendix Nine.

**Qualification Certificates:** Necessary before a returned man could apply for a soldier settlement block. The applicant had to produce four references attesting to his suitability to become a soldier settler. He attended an interview and, if he was considered suitable, his qualification certificate was issued.

**Rumen:** The first of the four stomachs of a cow. Namely the rumen, reticulum, omasum, abomasum.
Section 20: The soldier settlers under this scheme asked the C.S.B. to purchase them a particular block instead of being part of an estate. They were less successful than settlers on Estates. The C.S.B. adopted the attitude that these settlers should have known what the block was like when they applied to have it bought on their behalf. Therefore, it was less sympathetic when the settler got into difficulties.

Species: A group of individuals (in this case plants) having some characteristics in common. Basic category of biological classification.

Subterranean clover: A plant, which changes, through symbiotic association with the nodules on the roots, the nitrogen in the air into a form which plants can use. Mature leaves have three leaflets on the end of the leaf stalk. If the stalk on the centre leaflet is longer than the other two the plant is called a medic while if it is the same length the plant is called a clover. Clovers have a high nutritional value for livestock. Now recognised as being the most important plant in the pasture mixture. The nitrogen fixing qualities of clover were not understood in the 1920s and 1930s.

Superphosphate: made by the addition of sulphuric acid to rock phosphate. The rock phosphate has traditionally been obtained from decomposed bird droppings.

Undulant fever: (Brucellosis) Humans usually acquire the disease through the ingestion of contaminated milk or milk products, or through a break in the skin. It is characterised by fever, chills, sweating, malaise and weakness. The fever often occurs in waves, rising in the evening and subsiding in the morning with periods of remission. Other signs and symptoms include anorexia and weight loss, headache, muscle and joint pain and an enlarged spleen. In some victims the disease is acute; more often it is chronic, recurring over a period of months or years. Although rarely fatal, treatment is important because serious complications such as pneumonia, meningitis and encephalitis can develop.

Water logging: When all the air in the soil is replaced by water. The oxygen content of waterlogged soils is very low which reduces the ability of living organisms, including plant roots to respire and function properly.
**Livestock Water Requirements in Victoria.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Livestock.</th>
<th>Litres per animal per year</th>
<th>Litres per animal per day (Average)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sheep:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nursing ewes on dry feed</td>
<td>3,300</td>
<td>9.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fat lambs on dry pasture</td>
<td>800</td>
<td>2.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mature sheep on dry pasture</td>
<td>2,500</td>
<td>6.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fat lambs on irrigated pasture</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>1.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mature sheep on irrigated pasture</td>
<td>1,300</td>
<td>3.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cattle:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dairy cows, dry</td>
<td>16,000</td>
<td>43.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dairy cows, lactating</td>
<td>25,000</td>
<td>68.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>beef cattle, dry</td>
<td>16,000</td>
<td>43.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>beef cows, lactating</td>
<td>45 - 110</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>calves</td>
<td>8,000</td>
<td>21.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Horses:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>working</td>
<td>20,000</td>
<td>54.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>grazing</td>
<td>13,000</td>
<td>35.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pigs:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>brood sows</td>
<td>8,000</td>
<td>21.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mature pigs</td>
<td>4,000</td>
<td>10.96</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


NB. These are average figures, obviously water requirements would increase in hot weather and decline during the cooler months.
Appendix Two

Classes of Land on Soldier Settlement Estates in South West Victoria

In Victoria between 1878 and 1909 all holdings over 640 acres were assessed by land valuers for the purposes of land tax. After 1909 a Federal land tax replaced this State tax.

The carrying capacity (sheep per acre) of the land was used to estimate its capital value. The results of the assessment were tabulated in the Victorian Land Tax Register published in the Government Gazette.¹ The figures in the Victorian Land Tax Register are probably the best classification of the quality of the land purchased for soldier settlement estates. On several of the smaller estates, the owner in 1909 could not be positively identified, therefore the class of land could not be accurately assessed.

There were four classes of land:
Class 1: capable of carrying 2 sheep per acre
Class 2: 1 to 1.5 sheep per acre
Class 3: 1 sheep per acre
Class 4: less than 1 sheep per acre.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Estate</th>
<th>District</th>
<th>Average Acreage</th>
<th>Shire</th>
<th>Amount paid Per acre (£A)</th>
<th>Class of land.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chrome</td>
<td>Coleraine</td>
<td>388.7</td>
<td>Dundas</td>
<td>3.08</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elderslie</td>
<td>Apsley</td>
<td>1,054.5</td>
<td>Kowree</td>
<td>2.95</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glenorchy</td>
<td>Grassdale</td>
<td>328.3</td>
<td>Glenelg &amp; Portland</td>
<td>7.50</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greenhills</td>
<td>Penshurst</td>
<td>296.1</td>
<td>Minhamite</td>
<td>7.72</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gringegalgon</td>
<td>Cavendish</td>
<td>1,022.1</td>
<td>Wannon</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hensley Park</td>
<td>Hamilton</td>
<td>330.3</td>
<td>Dundas</td>
<td>7.50</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hilgay</td>
<td>Coleraine</td>
<td>202.6</td>
<td>Wannon</td>
<td>10.50</td>
<td>1/2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knebsworth</td>
<td>Macarthur</td>
<td>147.1</td>
<td>Minhamite</td>
<td>9.34</td>
<td>2/3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kongbool</td>
<td>Harrow</td>
<td>1,089.8</td>
<td>Wannon</td>
<td>2.25</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Konongwootong Nth</td>
<td>Coleraine</td>
<td>371.0</td>
<td>Wannon</td>
<td>6.43</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korongah</td>
<td>Koroit</td>
<td>45.5</td>
<td>Belfast</td>
<td>57.01</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murndal</td>
<td>Coleraine</td>
<td>116.0</td>
<td>Dundas</td>
<td>14.96</td>
<td>2/3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nangeela</td>
<td>Casterton</td>
<td>203.8</td>
<td>Glenelg</td>
<td>11.10</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Squattleseamere</td>
<td>Port Fairy</td>
<td>387.7</td>
<td>Dundas</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Struan</td>
<td>Merino</td>
<td>118.3</td>
<td>Glenelg</td>
<td>16.38</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tahara</td>
<td>Coleraine</td>
<td>85.9</td>
<td>Glenelg &amp; Portland</td>
<td>18.79</td>
<td>2/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trangnars</td>
<td>Coleraine</td>
<td>90.4</td>
<td>Wannon</td>
<td>17.49</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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## Estates in South West Victoria

### Appendix Three

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<tr>
<th>Estate District</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Acreage</th>
<th>No. of Settlers</th>
<th>Average Acreage</th>
<th>Previous Owner</th>
<th>Shire Amount Paid for Estate (£)</th>
<th>Amount Paid per Acre (£)</th>
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<th>Average Acreage</th>
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Source: C.S.B. Annual Report 1929. Estates of less than £6,000 in value are only listed by Shire, not by seller.
Appendix Four

Acts of Parliament Relating to Soldier Settlement

An Act to Further Amend the Closer Settlement Acts and for Other Purposes. (Act N. 2,629, 1915)

Consolidation of previous Acts
Maximum value of each block set at £2,500
Repayment over 73 half year instalments at 4.5 per cent.
Provision for lien on crops if arrears amount to over 60 per cent of the value of improvements.
The acquisition of blocks to be by agreement between the L.P.M.B. and the vendor. If the offer is not acceptable land may be acquired compulsorily only after a resolution passed by both houses of Parliament.

An Act to make Provision for the Settlement of Discharged Soldiers on the Land and for other Purposes 1917. (Act No 2,916, 1917)

To be read in conjunction with the 1915 Act.
Only discharged servicemen eligible. Applications must be accompanied by a Qualification certificate.
Minister may direct no repayments for the first three years.
Maximum advances £500.
Acquisition of land by consent after valuation by independent valuers. If the offer was unacceptable to the vendor the Governor in Council may direct the acquisition of land.

An Act to Amend Section Four of the Closer Settlement Act 1915 (Act No. 2,948, 1918)
Relates to the appointment of the Closer Settlement Board and the secondment of public servants to the Board.

An Act to Amend the Closer Settlement Act 1915 (Act No. 2,987, 1918)
Amended the 1915 Act
Amendments relate mainly to the method of land acquisition and the vendors right of appeal.
Residence qualifications increased from 3 to 5 years.

An Act to Amend the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Act. (Act No. 3,130, 1921)
Any materials, implements or livestock purchased with funds supplied by the Closer Settlement Board remain the property of the Board until all liabilities are discharged.
An Act to Amend the Closer Settlement and Discharged Soldiers Settlement Act and For Other Purposes. (Act No. 3,253, 1922)

Amended various sections of the 1915 Act including the extension of borrowing powers of the Closer Settlement Board.

An Act to Amend the Closer Settlement Acts. (Act No. 3,332 1923)

Amended various sections of the 1915 Act relating to the determination of land values in claims for compensation for land acquired compulsorily.

Altered lease conditions to enable settlers to transfer to another block after three years instead of six years.

Advances to settlers to be regarded as a charge on the land and may be further secured if the Board thought fit.

An Act to Amend the Closer Settlement and Discharged Soldiers Settlement Act and For Other Purposes. (Act No. 3,422, 1925)

Strengthened the power of the Board to recall advances and forfeit leases if the improvements are not maintained.

Gave the Closer Settlement Board the power to defer payments of soldier settlers under certain conditions.

Gave the Board the power to recommend re appraisement of the capital value of land under certain conditions.

Gave the Board the power to recommend that certain debts may be written off for some settlers.

An Act to Amend the Closer Settlement Act and For Other Purposes. 1929 (Act No. 3,622 1929)

Extends the time in which the Closer Settlement Board could grant advances to settlers from 6 years to 12 years.

Gave the Board the power in certain cases to increase the area of land allocated to a settler provided it did not exceed the maximum value authorised by the Act.

Closer Settlement Act 1929 (Act No 3,656, 1929)

Relates to the financing of the scheme.

Closer Settlement Act Financial 1929 (Act No. 3,843, 1929)

Amends Act No. 3,665.

Sets borrowing limits of the Closer Settlement Board.

An Act to Amend Section 19 of the Closer Settlement Act 1928 (Act No. 4,008, 1931)

Increased the borrowing limits of the Closer Settlement Board from £11,250,000 to £11,650,000.
An Act to Further Amend Section 19 and Section 197 of the Closer Settlement Act 1928 (Act No. 4,008, 1931)

Increased the borrowing limits of the Closer Settlement Board to £11,875,000.

An Act Relating to the Constitution of a Closer Settlement Commission and the Powers and Duties thereof, to Amend the Closer Settlement Acts and for other Purposes. (Act No.4,091, 1932)

Replaced Board system under Ministerial control with an independent Commission.

Had power to grant further areas of land in excess of the maximum value to make up a living area.

Reviewed liabilities of all settlers and wrote off substantial debts.

An Act to Amend the Closer Settlement Acts and the special Funds Acts and for Other Purposes 1933 (Act No. 4,190, 1933)

Provided for the private sale of land acquired by the Closer Settlement Board but not deemed suitable for the purpose of the Act.

Allowed Closer Settlement Commission to secure debts due to any means it thinks proper.

Provision for limited compensation to lessees or widows/children of lessees where leases have been cancelled for breeches not arising from inefficiency or neglect.

An Act to Further Amend Section 19 and Section 197 of the Closer Settlement Act 1928. (Act No. 4,257, 1934)

Increased the borrowing powers of the Closer Settlement Commission.
Appendix Five

Concessions granted to Victorian Soldier Settlers

Initial concessions.¹

Free period on land – one to three years.

Interest on advances, 3.5 per cent per annum rising to a maximum of 5 per cent per annum.

The State’s payment of interest over 5 per cent per annum in respect of moneys borrowed for soldier settlement at a higher rate of interest (the State charged the settlers a maximum rate of 5 percent per annum).

Sustenance granted to settlers.

Subsequent concessions.²

Closer Settlement Act 1925. Section 15 and 16, Act No 3,422: Settlers had the right to apply to have their interest rates reduced on account of adverse circumstances and any excessive cost of buildings adjusted.³

Appointment of Appeals Board. Appeals Board acted from 2nd June 1924 to 31st of December 1924, and which reported on applications received from settlers who considered that they did not have a reasonable living area and that the capital value of the blocks was high.

Nine District Inquiry Boards were appointed in April and June 1927 to investigate applications from soldier settlers to have their general position reviewed.

Concessions granted by the Closer Settlement Commission.⁴

Payment of a maximum of £100 to settlers whose leases had been forfeited.

Granting of additional land where settlers did not have a ‘home maintenance area’.

The transfer of settler from unsuitable blocks to areas affording them the necessary opportunities to succeed.

‘Facilities have been given to settlers to furnish particulars of their income and expenditure, with a view to the annual instalments payable by them being so adjusted as to be within their ability to pay. Thus the State instead of the settlers has borne losses incidental to adverse conditions.’

All blocks in the State were re-valued and liabilities were adjusted. Improvements effected by the settlers out of their own money were excluded and credit was given for capital payments on land and improvements. The Commission had the power to review the liabilities as they existed at that stage and make adjustments it considered necessary.

In addition the Commission could grant further equity to each settler to enable him to remain on his holding and meet his commitments under conditions favourable to his success. (Closer Settlement Act, 1932. Section 32.)
Appendix Six

Outline of the Inquiries and the Royal Commission\(^5\)

*Appeal Board*

On 2nd June, 1924, an Appeal Board was appointed to deal with and report on the following matters:

1. The fair capital value of any allotment leased or intended for leasing to discharged soldiers.

2. Whether the area at present held by any soldier settler is a reasonable area.

3. To consider necessitous cases and report the amount which any settler may properly be required to pay during the next three years.

*Royal Commission on Soldier Settlement*

On 21st January, 1925, a Royal Commission was appointed to inquire into the question of soldier settlement but more especially into the following matters:

1. Where the efficiency of settlers has been impaired through war injuries, and they were receiving pensions, what special concessions, if any, are recommended?

2. In connexion with land utilized for Soldier Settlement

   (a) Was same, suitable for the purpose?

   (b) Was it acquired it fair market prices at the time it was purchased

   (c) Was the system of valuation thorough?

   (d) Was the method of subdivision satisfactory?

   (e) Were the areas allotted to settlers living areas?

3. Are the provisions of the Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Acts so far as they relate to the

   (a) Capital value of allotments;

   (b) Advances on improvements;

   (c) Advances on live stock;

---

(d) Advances on implements

(e) Advances on seed and manure

sufficiently liberal?

4. Is it desirable that the Board should continue to make advances to settlers after the expiration of the first, six years of their leases; if not, what method of financial assistance is recommended?

5. Having regard to the conditions obtaining at the time of erection, are the settlers charged reasonable prices for their buildings?

6. Whether arrangements between the Commonwealth and State Governments for the settlement of discharged soldiers has proved to be an equitable arrangement and if not, what would be in equitable arrangement?

7. Conditions of land purchased under section 20, Closer Settlement Act 1915, and in section 20 purchases in the Mallee, whether the Government should accept payment on the basis of the present actual value of future instalments of purchase money?

**Summary of Recommendations of the Royal Commission on Soldier Settlement**

It is as easy to enumerate the different kinds of adjustments requiring attention as difficult to indicate how they can be effected. Their mere recapitulation may, however, serve to show that patience and time alone can bring about their accomplishment.

1. Revaluation of Lands - Applies mainly to mistakes in apportioning the price paid for estates among the subdivisions, as the former, with few exceptions, were well bought. Overvalued blocks imply a corresponding under-valuation of other blocks in the same estate. In practice re-valuation will mean reduction only.

2. Unsuitable Blocks - Usually the result of faulty subdivision. Other farms must be found for present occupants if they so desire, and, where the land cannot be allotted in part or wholly to adjoining soldiers, it should be sold. No attempt to settle another tenant on an unsuitable block should be made.

3. Insufficient areas - When and where possible, additional land will have to be found by subdividing forfeited and abandoned blocks, and acquiring adjoining, new land where it is procurable at a satisfactory price.

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Verbatim transcript of the recommendations. Royal Commission into Soldier Settlement, op. cit., 1925.
4. Water and Drainage - Where the settlement implied the provision of water or drainage schemes to secure these needs should be carried out with all diligence.

5. Arrears - Funding of arrears, and other financial adjustments, to relieve deserving cases from undue pressure, should be expedited. Action at this point is urgent and imperative if discontent is to be removed and settlers encouraged to put forward their best efforts.

6. Misfits - No encouragement of any kind should be extended to misfits, but they should be judged sympathetically and, under certain conditions, their exit from the scheme should be facilitated by granting discharges of their liabilities.

We recognize that the above correctives are already active parts of the policy of the administration, and that their application is, more or less, extremely difficult. At the same time we urge that greater readiness to admit the necessity of adjustments on these lines, and more vigour in their execution is desirable.

The following are positive recommendations

7. The maximum price of an ordinary farm should be raised from £2,500 to £3,500.

8. A closer settler should be allowed to hold two blocks.

9. Interest or "fines" on the interest part of payments of advances should be remitted for the first five (5) years.

10. The Board or the Water Commission (as the case may be) should be authorized to spend up to £200 on maintenance of vacant blocks.

_Inquiry Boards_

On 26th August, 1926, five Inquiry Boards were appointed to investigate and report on all applications lodged by soldier settlers for their arrears of interest to be written off on account of adverse circumstances suffered by them.

_District Inquiry Boards_

On 12th April, 1927, nine District Inquiry Boards were appointed at the instigation of the returned Soldiers' League. The following questions were referred to the Boards:

1. What adverse circumstances, if any, prevent or will prevent the settler from making a success of his holding?
2. Has the settler cultivated or worked his land to the best advantage?

3. Has the settler kept his land free from bracken, noxious weeds, and vermin?

4. Is the settler sufficiently experienced and physically capable of working his land to the best advantage?

6. Has the settler in the special circumstances in his case paid a reasonable amount of the instalments due and payable to the Board?

These Boards dealt with 3,542 cases, and their recommendations (where legal and practical) were given effect to in regard to:

1. Writing off arrears of interest.

2. Revaluation of land.

3. Granting additional land.

4. Reduction in cost of buildings.

5. Granting additional advances.

6. Permission to transfer to other blocks.
Inquiry into Losses Due to Soldier Settlement By Mr. Justice Pike

Mr Justice Pike was instructed by the Commonwealth government to enquire into and report upon:

1. The total losses that have been sustained by the respective States.

2. The principles upon which a final adjustment in respect of losses shall be made with the States generally.

3. Whether any State, on account of difficulties peculiar to that State, requires special assistance and, if so, the basis upon which such assistance should be given.

4. The additional contribution, if any, which the Commonwealth should make towards the losses of the respective States. Incidental to his report under the above headings, it was also desired that he should:

Inquire generally into the revaluations that have been made of settlers' blocks, plant, &c., and advise;

5. Whether the State Authorities concerned are satisfied that, as a result of the revaluations that have been made, the settlers can now be reasonably expected to make good.

6. Whether, if the reply to five be in the negative, what further sum the State Authorities consider it will be necessary to write off, and whether you agree with their estimates.

7. Whether, in your opinion revaluations have been made on too low a basis, and, if so, what sum is involved.

Examine the position in each State in its financial aspects and submit a report thereon, such report to include:

(a) Balance-sheet and profit and loss account, certified to by the Auditor-General of each State, showing the financial position, after bringing to account losses arising from revaluations referred to in five.

(b) Comments and explanations, where considered necessary, in regard to items appearing in the balance-sheet and profit and loss account, including, detail information where uniformity as between States has not been observed.

7 Pike, op. cit., 1929. pp. 5-6.
9. A statement showing the extent to which Crown Lands have been used in each State for soldier land settlement, the value at which they have been charged against the soldier settlement scheme and the effect thereof on the balance-sheet and profit and loss account.

10. Comments on any abnormal items, or items peculiar to individual States, which in your opinion, require the special consideration of the Commonwealth.

11. Inquire generally into the matter of those settlers who are regarded by the State authorities as unfit for land settlement by reason of their war disabilities, advise in respect of each State, the approximate number thereof, and furnish an estimate of the financial loss that has been sustained in respect of these settlers.

12. Inquire into the question of administration expenses on soldier land settlement and furnish an estimate as to the extra cost incurred in each State, as compared with ordinary land settlement, report on the main items making up such extra cost, and advise what sum may be reasonably attributed to costs arising from the special difficulties associated with soldier land settlement.

13. Ascertain the principles on which the remission and writing off of debts have been made in each State, and advise whether, in your opinion, the methods followed have been reasonable.

14. Ascertain the approximate extent to which these methods have affected the losses which have been sustained.

15. Inquire and report upon the steps taken by each State to recover advances from soldier settlers who have abandoned their holdings.
Appendix Seven

Victorian Commodity Prices

Table: Appendix 7.1: Average Prices of Butterfat, 1920 – 1944

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Table: Appendix 7.2: Average Wool Prices 1920 – 1944

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<tr>
<td>1930-31</td>
<td>8.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931-32</td>
<td>8.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1932-33</td>
<td>8.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1933-34</td>
<td>14.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1934-35</td>
<td>9.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1935-36</td>
<td>13.96</td>
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<tr>
<td>1936-37</td>
<td>16.39</td>
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<tr>
<td>1937-38</td>
<td>12.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1938-39</td>
<td>10.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1939-40</td>
<td>14.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940-41</td>
<td>14.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941-42</td>
<td>14.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1942-43</td>
<td>16.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Price £A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1919-20</td>
<td>£23-16-7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920-21</td>
<td>£23-15-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921-22</td>
<td>£10-6-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1922-23</td>
<td>£13-3-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1923-24</td>
<td>£15-18-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1924-25</td>
<td>£12-11-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1925-26</td>
<td>£16-18-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1926-27</td>
<td>£13-19-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1927-28</td>
<td>£18-17-8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1928-29</td>
<td>£15-19-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1929-30</td>
<td>£19-5-8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930-31</td>
<td>£14-18-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931-32</td>
<td>£10-13-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1932-33</td>
<td>£9-16-0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1933-34</td>
<td>£11-16-7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1934-35</td>
<td>£10-2-8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1935-36</td>
<td>£10-18-8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1936-37</td>
<td>£11-4-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1937-38</td>
<td>£13-8-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1938-39</td>
<td>£14-11-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1939-40</td>
<td>£13-1-7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940-41</td>
<td>£16-4-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941-42</td>
<td>£16-13-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1942-43</td>
<td>£18-8-7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1943-44</td>
<td>£20-13-10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table: Appendix 7.4: Fat Pig Prices 1919-20 to 1943-44

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Price £A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1919-20</td>
<td>£4-3-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920-21</td>
<td>£7-3-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921-22</td>
<td>£9-1-0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1922-23</td>
<td>£5-5-0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1923-24</td>
<td>£6-13-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1924-25</td>
<td>£6-7-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1925-26</td>
<td>£6-2-8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1926-27</td>
<td>£5-16-7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1927-28</td>
<td>£6-19-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1928-29</td>
<td>£7-11-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1929-30</td>
<td>£6-9-7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930-31</td>
<td>£4-4-7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931-32</td>
<td>£3-10-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1932-33</td>
<td>£3-8-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1933-34</td>
<td>£3-11-11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1934-35</td>
<td>£3-16-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1935-36</td>
<td>£3-14-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1936-37</td>
<td>£4-5-0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1937-38</td>
<td>£4-13-0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1938-39</td>
<td>£4-14-0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1939-40</td>
<td>£5-8-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940-41</td>
<td>£4-4-0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941-42</td>
<td>£5-4-0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1942-43</td>
<td>£7-8-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1943-44</td>
<td>£7-1-7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The average gross price over the twenty five years was £5-9-6 per head. Net to grazier £5-1-2. Note that these are Melbourne prices. Gillespie Jones estimates costs as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cost</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yard Dues</td>
<td>10d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compensation</td>
<td>1d in £1.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commission</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeding</td>
<td>4d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freight</td>
<td>1/2 per head. (Based on Victorian railways estimate of 120 Miles Av. Mileage. South West Victoria was nearly double this so freight could be increased to 2/ per head.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table: Appendix 7.5: Average Wheat Prices, (Melbourne) Ex Bounties

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Price per Bushel (60 lbs)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1919-20</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920-21</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921-22</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1922-23</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1923-24</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1924-25</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1925-26</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1926-27</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1927-28</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1928-29</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1929-30</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930-31</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931-32</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1932-33</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1933-34</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1934-35</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1935-36</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1936-37</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1937-38</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1938-39</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1939-40</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940-41</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941-42</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1942-43</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1943-44</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


1 Average freight from country stations 4.5 pence per bushel. Estimated handling charges, approximately 3 pence per bushel.
**Appendix Eight**

Sample 'Pink Form Report'

---

**CLOSER SETTLEMENT BOARD.**

**STATE:** Elderslie

**Govt. Settlement:** P. J. Martinich

**Alien.** 12

**Area:** 1164

**Discharged Alien:** 25

**Surrandarra**

---

**Date of Survey:** 11.8.20

**Capital Value, Land:** £ 66,451.12.8

**Amount received:** £ 85,19.9

---

**Amount received:** £ 85,19.9

**Land:** £ 66,451.12.8

**Amount of Advances:** £ 75,551.12.8

**Amount repaid:** £ 10,000.00

**Advances:** £ 50,000.00

**Value of Improvement:** £ 1,950

---

**CULTIVATION.**

What area is now cultivated? **400 acres.** Can this area be extended? **Yes.**

---

What crops are best suited to this area? **Cereals.**

---

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Crop</th>
<th>Average planted area (ac.)</th>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Remarks — Estimated Yield, ac.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maize</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wheat</td>
<td>10 acres</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oats</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barley</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orchard</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potatoes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

Was the land properly worked before these crops were sown? **Yes.**

---

Preduce on land: **350 ac.**

---

**PARTICULARS:** Artificial Grund. 350 ac. Native Grund. 90 acres.

---

Source: PROV VRPS, Box 97, P. J. Martinich, Elderslie Estate, Edward Murphy to C.S.B., 25.2.32.
### Implements and Machinery on Farm

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Advanced by Board</th>
<th>Private Placements</th>
<th>Price</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tractor £100</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>£100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 T. D. Plan £20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>£20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harvester £10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>£10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combine Sipfer 450 £20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>£20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roller £3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>£3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plough £5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>£5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tractor £50, Large Engine £50</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>£5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>£200</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Permanent Improvements Effected Since Going into Occupation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nature</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Nature</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Are existing improvements being maintained?</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>House for Planter £30</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Sheep shed £25</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>frame's additions £5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sheds £25</td>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fuel shed &amp; yard £100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleaning £50</td>
<td>50</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salt £50</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheds £50</td>
<td>50</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fencing £200</td>
<td>200</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fencing without £100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Windmill &amp; Fences £50</td>
<td>50</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>500</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Remarks:** 1905
### DAIRY CATTLE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total Number</th>
<th>Increase or Decrease since last Visit</th>
<th>Total Number.—How obtained</th>
<th>Number Milking</th>
<th>Estimated Value</th>
<th>Weekly Return</th>
<th>Annual Return per Cow</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>C. 0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>House use</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### OTHER LIVE STOCK

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kind</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Increase or Decrease since last Visit</th>
<th>Total Number.—How obtained</th>
<th>Estimated Value</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cattle (Other than Dairy)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horses</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheep</td>
<td>1200</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>550 lambs @ 2.95 live</td>
<td>300 wethers @ 2.45 dead</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pigs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poultry</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Natural increase taken into account.—Give particulars. 300 ewes and 100 crosses included in above.*
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