

# THE FOUNDING of MELBOURNE

## August 30, 1835



In the 1830's, the impetus for settlement in the Port Phillip district (Victoria) came from the pastoralists of Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania)

They wanted grazing land as they had already occupied most of the readily accessible crown land in Van Diemen's Land.

They could not afford the price the government was charging for any that had not been sold, and the recent Fencing and Impounding Acts had made it difficult for them to graze livestock on any land which they had not purchased.

However, they knew from reports of whalers and sealers, who were active in Bass Strait, that there was good land along the northern shores of Bass Strait.

Since Hume and Hovell had travelled overland to Corio Bay from Sydney in 1824, and a short-lived penal settlement had existed at Corinella in 1826 – 27, a number of Van Diemen’s Land pastoralists, including John Batman, Thomas and James Henty and a Hobart lawyer, Joseph Gellibrand, has asked the authorities in both London and Sydney for land grants on the mainland.

They had been consistently refused, as neither government wanted to incur the expense of setting up a new settlement.

So settlement became a matter of taking the law into one’s own hands and the Henty family moved across Bass Strait to settle at Portland where whalers had seasonally set up a whaling station.

Spurred on by the Henty initiative, Batman, Gellibrand, a banker, Charles Swanston, and John Helder Wedge, a government surveyor, decided that they would do the same, and they would reinforce their claim by buying land that they found suitable from the local Aborigines.

In April 1835, Batman chartered the 35 – ton sloop, Rebecca, and after being forced back twice by bad weather finally sailed from Port Sorell on May 26, reaching Indented Head on the Bellarine Peninsula in Port Phillip Bay on May 29, 1835 where he established his base camp.

Before the Batman party left Launceston, the lawyer, Gellibrand, had drawn up a Sales Treaty under which the indigenous people purported to sell a vast tract of Victoria to Batman’s party for a trivial sum of trinkets.

It was a priority for Batman to find the chiefs of the local tribe of Aborigines to sign his Treaty, and he set off from Indented Heads with a small party, with that objective. He first traversed the country around Corio Bay without success, then boarded the Rebecca and sailed to the head of Port Phillip, where the Rebecca was anchored off the Williamstown Peninsula.

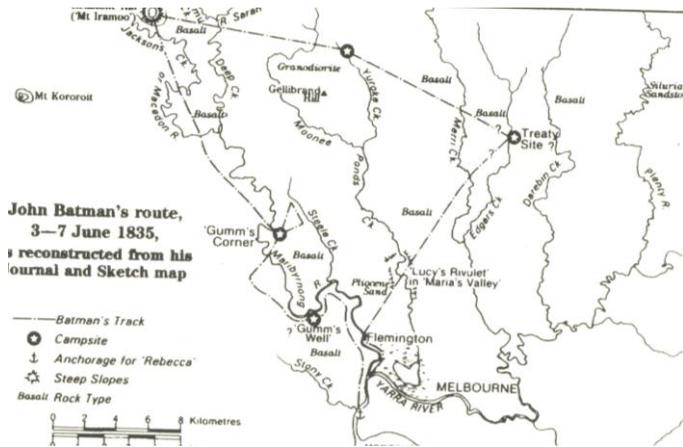
Next morning, the ship's boat, with Batman as a passenger, was taken into the lower reaches of the Yarra River, and soundings were taken to ensure it would be safe to anchor Rebecca while Batman went ashore in his search for Aborigines who would sell him land.

Batman went ashore at the mouth of Stony Creek, where the West Gate Bridge now crosses the river. He walked along the west side of the Maribyrnong towards what is now Footscray, not noting the junction where the Yarra joined the Maribyrnong and by the second day had gone as far as Horseshoe Bend, Keilor.

Next day while the party rested at Redstone Hill south east of Sunbury which Batman named Mount Iramoo, smoke from an Aboriginal fire was sighted in the east, and it was decided to move in that direction instead of continuing towards Mt Macedon. Contact was made with a party of Aborigines and the Treaty was signed on June 6, 1825, near Edgars Creek, Thomastown.

With this agreement, Batman claimed to have purchased 500,000 acres, (about 200,000 hectares) for the total price of about \$400.00 worth of goods handed over immediately and the promise of similar payments ever year.

Batman returned to the Maribyrnong, which he reached about the Flemington Racecourse, then followed down the east side of the river through marshy country. In his journal, Batman noted "after crossing the marsh we passed through tea – tree scrub, very high and thick" and they were surprised to find themselves on the bank of "a much larger river". The party had reached the junction of the Maribyrnong and the Yarra flowing in from the east.



*Reconstruction of John Batman's route 3-7 June, 1835*

Batman could not cross the Yarra, so he dispatched two members of his party to swim the Maribyrnong, walk to the Rebecca and bring the ship's boat upstream to pick him up.

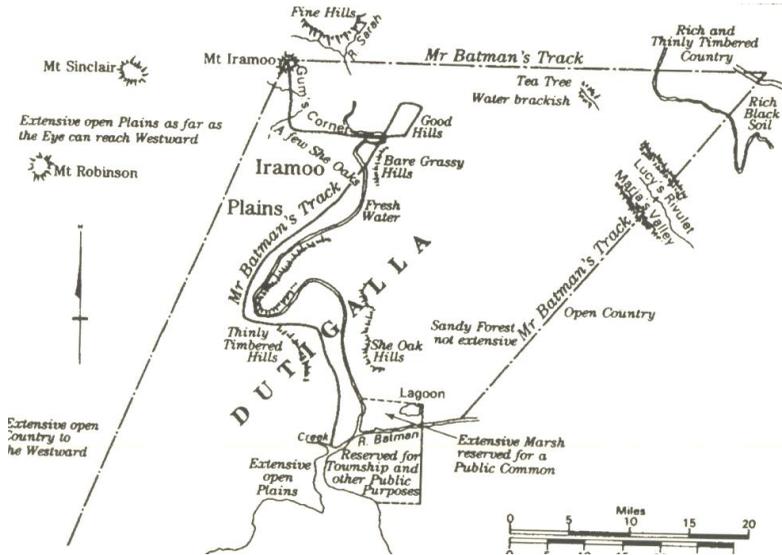
Next day the Rebecca attempted to sail out of the river to return to the base camp at Indented Head, but the wind was adverse. It was then decided to send the ship's boat to explore the river which Batman had encountered on his return, namely the Yarra.

On its return, the boat's crew reported "good water" six miles up. They had certainly reached the falls in the river where Queen's Bridge now stands and where the brackish tidal water met the fresh. In his journal Batman noted "this will be the place for a village."

On June 9, 1835 Batman sailed from Indented Head leaving a party of eight to look after his interests, and to prevent any other ships entering Port Phillip.

Much later, and now back in Van Diemen's Land, surveyor John Helder Wedge and Batman prepared a map of the area which showed a reservation for a township on the south side of the Yarra.

The map also showed “Batman’s Track” on his way back as meeting the Yarra about the subsequent site of Melbourne. This was not consistent with his Journal, and was apparently an attempt to include the new settlement within the area that he claimed to have purchased.



*Part of John Batman’s sketch map of ‘Dutigalla’, with a selection of his descriptive phrases.  
Adapted from F. Dangerfield’s lithographed facsimile (1871)*

When Lieutenant Governor Arthur in Hobart and Governor Bourke in Sydney learned of the land “agreement”, neither was willing to recognise it or the settlement at Indented Head without authority from London.

It would take at least a year to receive instructions, and Bourke declared that in the interim he would regard those settling at Port Phillip as trespassers. When the orders did arrive, in September 1836, settlement was permitted, but the Batman land “purchase” was declared invalid. This decision accorded with the Government’s general land policy, and there were grave doubts about the claims of Batman.

The contents of the Batman Journal were not known to Governor Arthur in Hobart, but a report was submitted to the Governor, together with maps prepared with Wedge after Batman had returned from Port Phillip in June, 1835. This report claimed Batman and the local Aborigines had marked trees at the corners of the purchased land. This was clearly impossible for such a large area, in the time Batman had spent there. His journal recorded the marking of only one tree.

By the end of June, Batman and his backers had formally organised the Port Phillip Association with fifteen members, to start sending sheep to Port Phillip.



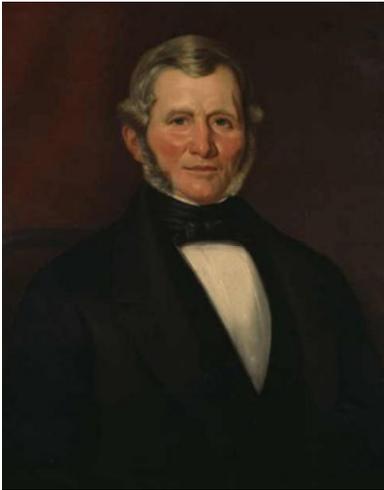
**John Pascoe Fawcner**  
La Trobe Picture Collection –  
State Library of Victoria

George Evans, a Launceston builder later claimed that when he heard Batman tell his story in the Cornwall Hotel he had turned to the landlord John Pascoe Fawcner and said, “Well, Fawcner what do you say about going to Port Phillip?”

They were soon to go, for the acquisitive Fawcner, builder – merchant, publican and newspaper owner, son of a convict who had come out to Sorrento in 1803, had already shown an interest in settling and trading there.

In April he had bought in 55 – ton schooner *Enterprise* to take him to Port Phillip, but he did not get possession of it until July 18, 1835.

Fawcner and his associates – master mariner, Captain John Lancey, George Evans and carpenters, William Jackson and Robert Hay Marr, prepared for the journey.



*George Evans*

They were joined by Fawkner's ploughman, Charles Wise, Blacksmith, James Gilbert and his wife, Mary and Even Evans, servant to George Evans.

Mary Gilbert later gave birth to the first white child born in Victoria.

Unfortunately for Fawkner, owner of the *Enterprize* bad weather delayed their departure from Van Diemen's Land allowing his Launceston creditors to stop him from leaving so he was not on board when it left George Town on August 4, 1835.

Fawkner put Captain John Lancey in command of the party, and searching for a place to settle they first looked at Western Port, then along the east coast of Port Phillip. Finally, they entered the lower Yarra, and warped the *Enterprize* along its course until being able to sail upstream where the *Enterprize* was tied up alongside the northern bank about where William Street and Flinders Street meet today, just near the Old Customs House.

On August 30, 1835, our first settlers from the *Enterprize* landed and at once discharged cargo, commenced the building of a thatched storage hut and the clearing of land along the north bank of the Yarra River.

With the settlement of Melbourne well under way, the *Enterprize* left to return to Launceston on September 3 to collect Fawkner.

He returned later to play his part in shaping the settlement, along Batman, Lonsdale, Hoddle, and other pioneers.

But none of them was present on the day when the site of the future Melbourne was first settled on August 30, 1835.

The Founders of Melbourne were those who landed from the *Enterprize*.

The Melbourne Day Committee was established in 1992 and host the annual celebrations.

Today the Melbourne Day committee mission is to educate and encourage Melburnians to acknowledge the founding of Melbourne, celebrate its anniversaries and showcase the various attributes that make our city a wonderful place to live, work and visit.

Each year we commemorate 30 August with celebrations across the City of Melbourne.

For more information on the first settlement, celebrations and more go to [www.melbourneday.com.au](http://www.melbourneday.com.au)



# MelbourneDay.com.au

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The La Trobe Collection, State Library of Victoria. Professor A.G.L Shaw, A History of Port Phillip District; Victoria Before Separation. Migunyah Press, MUP 1996. Dr Stuart Duncan, Victorian Historical Journal, Vol. 17, No 2, June 1986, PP, 1-12

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