

## **Introduction**

Rena R. Henderson

ORCID.org/0000-0001-7851-9361

### **Abstract**

This longitudinal study of a frontier rural area in North-West Tasmania aims to explore the intimate connection between yeoman ideals and sustainable family farming from 1860 upto 2000. The chapter introduces the setting – the region, geography and climate. This work breaks new ground with its historical focus on a hinterland district ultimately served but not dominated by a small town. Historical development of yeoman characteristics across the English-speaking world is reviewed to clarify the appeal of yeoman ideals to the highest level of governments down to the lowliest family settlers. Land and its productive capacity was seen by all as the true key to wealth. In Australia, perceptions about yeoman self-sufficient farms served as counterpoint to pastoralist squatters' power when this was being questioned by politicians, who needed their populations and economies boosted and consequently endorsed policies to encourage small farmers.

### **Introduction**

The intimate connection of yeoman ideals to family farming was a fundamental part of the history of Australian agriculture almost from the earliest time of European occupation. The long history of yeomanry and the associated notions of pioneering agricultural work on small farms and independent subsistence arrived from England with the First Fleet and Governor Phillip, whose royal instruction was to 'proceed with the cultivation of the land' (25 April 1787, HRA 1914 Vol.1, 15 quoted by Shaw in Williams 1990). Ever since, the crucially important contribution made by small family farms to Australia's economic growth was based on their large families that provided labour for sustainable agricultural output. The cultural importance of family-operated farms continues to arouse supportive responses to media stories like drought

or flooding, indicating widely-held positivity towards farmers and their communities well into the present century (Lloyd and Malcolm 1997, 59).

Historian John McQuilton argued that the concept of the yeoman ideal in both Australia and **America** gave primacy to land ownership as the true key to wealth; small-scale agricultural production stimulated permanent settlement and engendered ‘independence in spirit, self-sufficiency and democratic values’. He made a connection with Frederick Turner’s ‘frontier thesis’ of 1893, but suggested that earlier ‘powerful champions’ of the ideal had included **Thomas Jefferson** and **Ernest Gibbon Wakefield** (McQuilton 1993, 32).

In this book, I examine whether that intimate connection between the institution of family farming and yeoman ideals still endures, using the case study of the family farming community of Castra in North-West Tasmania. Starting at first European settlement there, this rural social history extends forward to the end of the twentieth century. Such a long time-span was essential to demonstrate that yeoman ideals in self-sufficient family farming were the motivating force for settlement success, and that these ideals remained strong over several succeeding generations, lasting in some families to 2000 and beyond. Castra and its farmers provide an example of the success and endurance of the yeoman ideal.

### **The Setting**

In North-West Tasmania, the parish of Castra is 50,000 acres of forest and agricultural land that extends from the Leven River eastwards to the Wilmot River, a tributary of the Forth River. It encompasses large rural villages that developed at Gunns Plains, Preston, Upper Castra and Nietta. The area is located between fourteen and twenty miles south and inland from the coastal town of Ulverstone. When Ulverstone was only a collection of cottages and land grants, it was known as Leven after the Leven River on the coastal banks of which it grew.

As seen from figure 0.1, the Leven is one of five large rivers that flow northward into Bass Strait between Emu River in the west and Tamar River in the east. The others are the

Rubicon meeting Bass Strait at Port Sorell; the Mersey flowing into the sea between Formby and Torquay, later amalgamated to form Devonport; the Forth meeting the sea at Leith; and the Blyth flowing out at Heybridge.

The county name was Devon; from 1856 it had one representative in Parliament. Following the 1870 *Electoral Act*, in 1871 it was divided into Wellington (west of Emu Bay/Burnie), West Devon (encompassing my area of interest) and East Devon (from Devonport to the Tamar), each having one Member of Parliament. By 1885, population had grown sufficiently for five members to represent the North-West Coast (Townsley 1956, 69).

The hinterlands of West Devon contain several ranges of low mountains dominated by Black Bluff (4383 feet/1336 metres high), which drains north-west into the Leven and east into tributaries of the Forth River. This was snow-covered from July to October each year in the childhoods of elders interviewed and was still the case up to the 1980s (Binks 1980, 15).

Space for two figs. 0.1 and 0.2

Rainfall averaged from 30 inches (750mm) along the coast to over 70 inches (1800mm) along the mountain ranges, where dense wet sclerophyll forest began to yield to moorland (Stokes 1969).

Sporadically, there were areas of undulating high plains and river flats, where trees were more thinly distributed in sharp contrast to the remainder that was dense ‘bush’ or so-called ‘scrub’ and thickly-growing trees, enormous in height and girth. The dominant species were eucalypts, *E. obliqua* (stringybark), *E. ovata* (yellow gum), *E. viminalis* (white gum) and *E. regnans* (swamp gum) in the damp valleys (Stokes 1969). A close undergrowth of Sassafras, Musk, Dogwood, and fern trees among others completed the picture (Calder 1860; News 1860b). Prior to European occupation, the rivers had heavily treed, steep-sided valleys, with strong year-round river flow through them. All except the Leven were dammed for hydroelectricity in the later twentieth century.

Tasmania has attracted comment about its benign and healthy climate since its occupation by Europeans in the early nineteenth century. In 1902, New Zealand legislator and diplomat Pember Reeves described Tasmania as:

A valuable colony not much smaller than Scotland, and, like Scotland, a land of cliff and mountain, lake and forest, with precipitous coasts and peaks that rival the Grampians [in Scotland] in height. . . . Its latitude is Italian and its climate more resembles that of Brittany. . . . All that is useful in English flora will grow, and most of it does grow, in Tasmania (Reeves 1902, 19-20).

Wood wrote that Tasmania's geological composition 'exerted a big influence on lives and occupations' because the varied relief allowed a wide range of crops and economic activity, from timber-getting, agriculture, dairying, orchards and 'pasturing' (1923, 11). In the volcanic period, lava flows formed sheets of basalt in Tasmania's North-East and North-West that decayed to form 'wonderful chocolate soils' and remained as hills through which streams carved their courses (Wood, 20-1). These were described in 1860 as 'almost uniformly of a red colour and are of considerable depth, varying from about four to eight feet in thickness, the choicest land being most thickly timbered' (Calder 1860).

Situated about 41-42° south, Tasmania had 'a cool maritime climate of distinct seasons' with shorter winters and longer summers than the British colonists' experience of the 'mother country'. This climate was long-touted as conducive to good health by the many who particularly advocated it for recovery from tropical India (Reynolds 2005, 458; Walker 2011). Regular winter rainfall and generally hot dry summers with the moderating influence of the sea breezes is the typical experience in the Castra district. The topography and climate are important underlying themes in this history.

Tasmania's North was identified in what Warwick Frost called Australia's 'wet frontier' of high-rainfall forests that stretched from the tropics of Cairns' hinterland down the Dividing Range of eastern Australia to Gippsland, the Otways and King Island into Tasmania. Although timber-getters had made early incursions, farming settlement in the forests was slow to take off before the 1870s (Frost 1997, 19-20). The lands of Castra were another type of frontier – an

agricultural one that contrasted with the ‘pastoral frontier’ that developed in Australia’s South-East from the 1860s and in Tasmania from the 1830s.

Devon’s identity as an agricultural community was already evident from its early population figures; just over 3,000 in 1857 grew to 5,416 by 1861, 572 of whom were land-owning farmers, 1099 were farm labourers and only 43 were shopkeepers or businessmen (Pink, 1990, 104). Women and children may have represented most of the remaining 1,714. The 1870 census recorded place of birth; the majority (3,583) were Tasmanian-born, either before 1851 or as children of early immigrants arriving after 1851. From Great Britain and Ireland, there were 2,197, 82 from mainland colonies and 62 from Germany and North America (Census 1870). Town directories from 1890-1 to 1941 confirm that farmers predominated over ‘labourers’ and ‘other settlers’ in feeder communities of Ulverstone and North Motton in earlier years until post offices opened in Castra’s villages of Upper Castra, Gunn’s Plains, Preston, Preston South and Nietta (Wise 1890 to 1941). The figures recorded reflect changes referred to in later chapters.

The striking eye-level view of river and mountain range seen by the 1860-70 pioneers features in figure 0.2. The Leven bridge opened in September 1866 improving access to Penguin, the next settlement west along the coast. On the left bank called Nicholson’s Point, the larger house was the first house on the Leven recorded by surveyor James Scott in November 1851. The distinctive peak is called Mount Gnomon (Scott 1851, Devon Map 90, AF396-1-702). It was the subject for Tom Roberts in 1899, painting the Dial Range from the Ulverstone Wharf.

This book bridges an identified gap in rural histories that extend across the colonial period up to the end of the twentieth century. Also importantly, it refutes opinions that the yeoman ideal was an anachronism by the time of Australia’s Federation in 1901. I examine how characteristics intrinsic to the yeoman ideal served settler communities very satisfactorily,

because it encouraged people to create strong kinship-linked families and develop connectedness to land they owned. This was achieved through common interests and associations that developed ties binding residents together in stable, enduring ways over generations – even through two world wars, the Depression and the agricultural crisis of the late twentieth century.

It is not a new idea that people and communities are held together by intangible ‘webs of association’ and ‘the everyday fabric of connection and tacit cooperation’ identified by Adam Smith in 1776, de Tocqueville in 1840 and Durkheim in 1897 (Halpern, 2005, 3-5). Each farming community develops uniquely depending on the character, motivation and ideals of its individuals. Such ties take time to develop in newly-settled frontier areas. Primary family ties grounded in life on a family farm are key from the start, but, before long, the needs of social contact, religious practice and neighbourly reciprocity must be satisfied in the interests of survival. How were those connections created? What were the common bonds the early settlers shared and did they help in times of inevitable adversity? How did ownership patterns connect settlers to the land and locality? How did the society sustain ties in the early years to support establishment of institutions? How did families manage generational change and durability of the farm and the family through succession and inheritance? Answers to these questions are addressed in chapters that focus on the various ways people approached settlement on this land from the colonial period of the 1860s through to the early-1920s settlement of soldiers after the Great War and how yeomen families managed their aspirations to hand on their land to family members or to help them establish themselves independently.

The conceptual framework of continuity and change is used to take a deeper look at aspects of farming families’ lives during the twentieth century. I evaluate the endurance of the yeoman ideal through tangible evidence of family ties, neighbourly relationships, business and economic arrangements, and religious and political allegiances. I consider how concepts of gender impacted on family decisions about farm succession and inheritance. Continuities are

contrasted with the effects of changes in family size and aspirations, and in land usage and farm size. Economic survival strategies demonstrate how family farmers adapted from self-sufficiency to capitalist commodities and engaged in self-help and political participation to benefit both their family and their enterprise.

My study is a rural history with an uneasy fit somewhere between regional and local history. So, where does it sit? In time, it is not limited to the pioneering phase of the late nineteenth century, though this was common in academic histories of Australian rural regions, according to Davison and Brodie, writing *Struggle Country* in 2005. They were critical of the paucity of historical attention to twentieth century rural history even when authors professed to cover two centuries of European settlement. Citing recent publications, they suggested the twentieth century seemed like a ‘postlude to the pioneering era’ (ix-xvi). Congruent with their title and tone, the twentieth century histories they highlight are tragic tales of adversity and failure, like Marilyn Lake’s *Limits of Hope* (1987), which receives more attention in a later chapter.

Regional history has a long tradition that has experienced high points. McCarty argued that regional history of the 1960s had ‘emerged as one of the most interesting areas of Australian historical writing’ ((McCarty 1978, 88). He highlighted the now-classic works by Kiddle (1961), Buxton (1967), Walker (1966), Waterson (1968) and Hancock (1972), agreeing with Hancock’s proposition that each new study had shown variety in both regional characteristics and historical approaches. These early works were mostly about pastoral areas that each formed a ‘formal or homogeneous region,’ but other types of regional history were important too. He defined a functional region as ‘a town or city and its hinterland’ affected by ‘a significant economic, social or political relationship’, such as Hirst’s important 1973 study about Adelaide and its relationship with country South Australia (McCarty 1978, 92). Another type is ‘the history of a group of related regions’, arguably applying to any Tasmanian history



with its distinct regionalism ((Reynolds 1969b, 14-28). One less-explored version was a country town and its hinterland, like Tom Griffiths' lauded study of Beechworth (Griffiths 1987). McCarty's later theorising that an 'inland corridor' linked interior settlements and towns would significantly influence two books aimed at broadening ideas of inland Australia (1980). These essay collections picked up themes of environmental, aboriginal, social and cultural histories with newer topics feeding debates like ecological, farming and societal sustainability (Mayne and Atkinson 2008, 2011).

Previously, Weston Bate had weighed into the discussion arguing that 'regional history without some geography is like a boat without a rudder' (1970, 106). He consistently argued that towns were an essential ingredient to rural histories due to their 'pervasive influence in the district' (108). Bate also saw that local history of a locality' could 'carry the torch' for regional history (118). In a way that resonates with the Puritan approach to development in (American) New England in small market towns that were also promoted in settling New Zealand. They were expected to be 'servants of productive farming districts rather than dominant masters' and factory production should serve the growth of agricultural wealth (Brooking 1996, 82-3). Endorsing this idea and because my study centres on the rural Castra community, I approach from the opposite perspective – it was its hinterland settlements and people that influenced Ulverstone's growth from an un-named cluster of cottages to a thriving commercial and transport hub. Bate's description of local history fits well with Mayne's position that 'micro-histories' of 'ordinary people' with their aspirations and experiences all contribute to Australia's 'social landscape' and is applicable to my work (2011, 2-4).

Laverty also endorsed 'competent local histories' to provide helpful secondary sources for regional historians. His main call was for greater integration of city and regional histories that pay particular attention to inter-relationships with wider hinterlands. Following his main theme, he criticised regional histories that overly focused on land settlement without integrating

local towns with hinterland activities, citing Bate's work on Ballarat that integrated the provincial city with its regional context and their common evolution (Lavery 1995, 103-138)). Both Buxton's Riverina study and Meinig's 1970 study of South Australia were applauded for demonstrating that integration. Lavery criticised the 1960s regional histories mentioned for seldom extending into the twentieth century, and ignoring or underplaying their towns' contribution to their hinterlands.

I agree that geography is especially relevant to rural histories. Outstanding physical geographical features of region, or hinterland and town, influence the shape of a functional history. For example, Tasmania's many distinctive characteristics stem from it being an island (see Solomon 1972; Harwood 2011). When the prevailing topography tends to dictate the way people make use of the land, that becomes its defining characteristic. Such characteristic images inform stereotypes that evoke "romantic" or nostalgic notions; thus, our image of *pastoral* land is of thin tree cover on undulating grasslands; our image of *forestry* is densely-packed trees going up hills to the rocky margins of growth; our image of the yeoman *agricultural* landscape is of a patchwork of fields with potatoes, poultry or pig-keeping within visible fencelines or hedges not far from a farm homestead such as typified by the physical landscape of small-scale yeoman farms in Western Australia (Tonts 2002, 106).

Regional boundaries may be either politically or physically loosely defined, especially when they fade away into unexplored or unalienated land. McCarty argued that evolving boundaries were more fitting for longer period studies because they reflected historically relevant changes. Pertinently, he emphasised that writers of regional social history are principally interested in the people, their social identity and unity, their pride in their customs and their distinctiveness, but their history still needs to relate to a wider setting and its broader significance explained (McCarty 1978, 92).

Rural life seemed to have been somewhat overlooked by historians in the previous thirty years, according to Darian-Smith in 2002, the gap being filled by social scientists analysing regional and rural change (2002, 92). Classic oft-cited Australian sociological studies are Alston in 1995 and Dempsey in 1990 and 1992. Historical geographers Powell and Davidson were the exception. They wrote about two aspects of rural history – people and land – in a study about Australian family farms (Lees 1997, 1-13). The ‘agrarian’ ideal, equated to yeomanry, represented ‘small-scale farming enterprises owned and operated by individual families’ (Lees, 1-13). He showed that this concept was adopted and mediated by farmers’ varied experiences across Australia’s differing climatic and soil zones, and that it was promoted by those in political power.

Davidson gave an overview of the crucial process of land policy and tenure, and the ways each colony used their policies to encourage selection of Crown lands by small farmers. He stated that single family farms have always been the main type of Australian agricultural unit, later generally supported by government policy because they achieved flexibility in daily decision-making compared with managed corporate-owned farms (Davidson 1997, 15-16, 29, 37-40, 53). How this was manifested in Tasmania’s colonial land policy is examined in relation to *Castra*’s genesis.

Historical geographers including these two men have written of the political attraction and the implications on the ground of Australia’s approach to the yeoman ideal. Roberts (1924) identified 1884 as the start of emphasis on the small farmer in Victoria and South Australia. The suggestion is that it lost its appropriateness for this continent due to climatic changeability and over-exploitation (Powell 1988; Davidson 1981). While I accept their proposition in connection to drier mainland Australian states, I argue that their view was much less appropriate for agriculture under North-West Tasmanian soil and climatic conditions – this area is still very different to most agricultural practice on our continent. I also contend that proliferation of a

‘rural idyll’ by city-based writers is a myth used to espouse the idea of country-mindedness to urbanites that never had any connection to the lives of yeoman family farmers, wherever they farmed (Davison 2005, 01.1-01.15).

Writing from a Tasmanian base, it is appropriate to mention different themes in Tasmanian rural history since the 1990s that extended into the early twentieth century. These include Breen recounting the history of the Deloraine area (2001), Cubit considering the differing constructs of nature in the Central Plateau (2001), Haygarth collaborating on works about mountain huts (2016) and the history of rural youth (2018), Bardenhagen exploring the German peoples of Lilydale in the Great War (1993), and Rootes, who has produced works about Tasmanian local government (2004, 2008). Alexander has written several municipal histories (2003, 2006, 2012) that tend to focus on their urban centres and allocate less space to rural life, though these would count as regional histories using Lavery’s criteria.

When a history of Victoria was mooted about 1980, Bate and Aveling proposed a three volume thematic social history called *The Victorians*. In ‘Settling’ (Vol.2), Dingle described a mob of selectors on the steps of Parliament in Melbourne in August 1860 clamouring for ‘A Vote, a Rifle and a Farm’, the last of which was most important to satisfy their post-gold-rush desire to settle down as yeomen farmers (1984, 58). According to him, the meaning of the yeoman ideal was seldom articulated because of the assumption that everyone understood it, so its interpretation varied in ways that would impact on Victoria’s agricultural policy-making and development for many decades. The idea of small areas of land that families could live on, rear animals and grow food for their own consumption without paying labour or being exploited by employers arrived with English radicals attracted by gold rushes. Before long, widespread unrest about the squatters’ power and landholdings came from many quarters, and the yeoman ideal was adapted to fit the different objectives of merchants, investors, land-hungry potential farmers and liberal-minded politicians. For the politicians, it was important for selectors of 320

or 640-acre lots to have families who could manage with their own labour in line with the yeoman ideal, deemed vital because ‘a class of rural labourers would run counter to the spirit of the yeoman idea’ (Dingle, 61-4). Thus, the family enterprise was ‘the foundation stone of the selection era’ by 1890 (76). The spread of yeoman farms to regions north of the Dividing Range and into Gippsland were the ‘turning point’ in Victoria’s agricultural history (102-30). Prior to Federation and driven by his need to boost population, Victorian Premier Thomas Bent was still anxious for ‘agriculturalist producers to settle using the real wealth from the soil to add to national wealth’ (Frost 1983, 196). This exemplified political attitudes to the value of the yeoman farming model.

Religious leaders in the 1880s believed that Queensland’s ‘moral health’ was supplied by the rural yeoman, ‘a stabilizing force’ against urban radicalism, because, according to Archbishop John Dunmore Lang, ‘a man with . . . land is unlikely to become a socialist or political’ (Lang 1891). Lang was a Presbyterian clergyman and politician who promoted education, immigration, and was an anti-transportation advocate believing in land reform. Following his ideals, political advocates pressed for legislation to enable agricultural interests and the yeoman ideal (Lang 1861 cited by Waterson 1968, 103-4).

In New South Wales’ northern rivers sugar-growing districts, a yeoman class of settler was favoured in 1870 because they settled permanently. Large plantation owners supported a land policy for small-holdings, believing yeomanry cane-growers would accept smaller profits in return for land-ownership. This strategy, according to a local newspaper of the 1870s, resulted in the highest density and level of influence of yeoman settlers in the colony. In 1871, one editor was advocating for any regulations to help establish ‘a sturdy yeomen class’, but, by 1877, he was less satisfied by their increasing political strength that ‘ignored every other class of settler’s interests’ (News 1870, 1871, 1877a).

The value of Dingle's book lay in unequivocally stating the significance of the yeoman ideal as a motivating force right across Victorian society. But then he argued that selectors behaved as if the land was an exploitable resource, meaning that they did not fit the yeoman ideal under which land was seen as a legacy to be cared for and protected (74-5). Where did the interpretation of the yeoman ideal come from and why might it manifest differently to its advocates?

### **Yeomanry and the Qualities of the Yeoman Ideal**

To answer the question about its origin, it is instructive to identify the characteristics of yeomen that informed the yeoman ideal. Trevelyan in his mammoth classic *History of England* argued the 'yeoman motif' infused a 'potent and life-giving force' to English thought, literature and politics from the Hundred Years' War through to the Industrial Revolution. He wrote that 'yeoman was used for a free peasant farmer, irrespective of whether his land was freehold or held on lease, until the late 18<sup>th</sup> century', and neither villeins nor landless labourers were yeomen (Trevelyan 1973 (1926), 275). The yeomen farmer benefited most after early enclosures as his methods improved, enabling him to give work to 'the humble' and avoid constant quarrels over shared commons; yeomen broke down the old structure of medieval lord and villein. Writing at the Civil War's outbreak, Thomas Fuller described the yeomanry as 'an estate of people almost peculiar to England. France and Italy. . . hath no points between nobility and peasantry' (quoted in 516). Yeomen freeholder and leaseholder farmers became identified as part of the 'middling' sort as small independent agricultural producers (Neale 1981, 74).

Interest in English social hierarchy led to three major national surveys over time; Gregory King (1688); Joseph Massie (1759); and Patrick Colquhoun from 1801-3 based on the 1801 (first) census (Hay and Rogers 1997, 19-21, 26-36). Yeomen farmers were hard to isolate because large and small freeholders and farmers were separate categories. In 1688, Gregory King estimated that fifty per cent of English farmers were owners (Rae 1883, 546-565). Two-

hundred years later, the yeomanry had declined so much that it drew attention to major property redistribution, and Gray (1910, 293-4) cited Rae as the first historian to importantly consider their decline. Using contemporary sources, Rae convincingly showed 1815 as the year disaster struck for yeomen farmers. While gaining from high grain prices and demand during the War with France (1793-1815), their numbers had grown through the so-called “*terramania*” land-grab in the Midlands and Yorkshire. From 1815, they were under pressure as prices dropped and the newly-mortgaged yeomen did not have the inherited asset of land to fall back on and keep them going; rents continued rising for yeomen tenant farmers especially in corn lands (Snell 1985, 193). Large fortunes made in local and colonial trade competed promptly for any available land. But by the 1870s, agricultural prices collapsed again, due to low production costs in North America of grain that was gradually supplanting local produce (Boyce 2020).

Newby (1987) wrote that the 1873 New Domesday Survey, promoted by Lord Derby to rebut claims of limited land ownership in Britain, actually confirmed the few elite landholders; however, it also divided landholders into aristocracy, gentry and yeomen with holdings of between 100 and 1,000 acres, who prospered during the mid-Victorian period (60-1, 71). Evidence to the Duke of Richmond’s Royal Commission of 1881 indicated decline was more wide-spread than previously supposed, identifying Lincolnshire as the yeoman’s last stronghold by 1880 (Gray 1910, 325). The yeoman small-holders of Lincolnshire were found to have suffered least of all farmers and were more resilient against cheap food imports (Thirsk 1957).

In spite of emigration appearing to offer a solution to their problems, Rae argued that:

The yeomen seldom sold to make better; they sold to save bad becoming worse. They relaxed their hold upon land slowly, and against their will. The land is the charter of their personal independence, and the foundation of all the hope and security of their life. . . . the small farmers belong [to a class that is] unspeculative, and, indeed, averse to speculation (Rae 1883, 556).

He affirmed that investment in their land was more attractive and satisfying than a bank deposit.

They valued being masters of their own fate, growing their own crops in their own way, not

answerable to anyone for their votes. Beckett (1977) found that Yorkshiremen were strongly rooted in independence and conspicuously industrious and economic; Westmorelanders were ‘very impatient of insult or oppression’ and expected respect from their superiors (567-581).

Ambiguities arose over the term yeoman, also used for copyholders and tenant farmers. Beckett identified differences in eighteenth-century Cumbria, where tenant farmers styled themselves as yeomen, because, under a distinctive northern land law, they held, or could inherit, ‘customary tenure’ with a title deed that was virtually freehold. Two thirds of Cumberland land was held this way, always owner-occupied. Yeomen farmers on larger holdings still existed there with rising prosperity by the late 1870s (Beckett 1982). As elsewhere, “by-employment”, meaning off-farm employment, was significant to their survival; blacksmiths, carpenters, tanning, salt-making and coal mining, and shipping in the coastal counties. Wealthier yeomen acted as executors for others and as stewards or bailiffs for the large estates. The 1861 census increased concern about the yeomanry’s displacement there and rising land accumulation by ‘greater magnates’, and radical calls for land reform were strengthened (Beckett 1982). This parallels similar discontent over the squatters’ stranglehold at about the same time on potential agricultural land suitable for subdivision for yeoman farmers in Australia’s mainland colonies.

Thus far, the *English* yeoman farmer has been characterised as forming the middle level between labourer and lord, conservative in practice, averse to speculation and wary of change. Their families were industrious, often with extra artisanal skills and flexible about by-employment. They were proud of their status as independent farm landholders.

Trevelyan noted that the yeomen, craftsmen and ‘small gentry’, used to living in substantial villages of the Midlands and south-east, were among the great majority of migrants to **New England** (North America) up to 1640, in response to religious and political conflicts. Their Puritan faith combined ‘self-help and economic individualism with residence in large



village groups' to form new communities (520). He claimed their hardiness and survival against their new challenges contributed to ideas of democracy, religious tolerance and 'the frontier spirit' of American history (Trevelyan, 522-7). This brings me to examine sources about American yeomen (Appleby 1982, 833-849; Fields 1985, 135-139, Ford 1986, 17-37, Attack 1988, 6-32, Wilkison 2008), and whether, as settlers in the New World, they developed different attributes. According to Webster's 1828 *Dictionary*, yeoman was 'a common man, or one of the plebeians, of the first or most respectable class; a freeholder, a man freeborn'.

Appleby wrote about the American post-revolutionary period when 'yeomanry' described freehold farmers, who she called 'ordinary farmers'. Similarly, others used 'plain folk'. She traced the thirty-year boom in agricultural produce after the Revolution ended in 1783. Ordinary farmers gained an unusual advantage in benefitting from demand in English and southern European markets. Those owning between 75-100 acres were able to increase surpluses of Indian corn, wheat and animals using only their own and family labour, using access to market by wagon or riverboat, without risks associated with dependence on cash crops of hemp or tobacco as in Virginia and North Carolina from the 1760s (Appleby; Risjord 1973, 30, 225).

A farmer himself, Thomas Jefferson's vision of 'democratic agrarianism' was a unique combination of agrarian philosophy from Europe grafted onto American democratic ideology (Lees 1997, 3). It grew from his intimacy with ordinary farmers' concerns and the triple combination of mixed farming, overseas trade and the 'golden era' of grain growing. 'Farmer' was the word for the new future, 'planter' was the word of the past. Opening new lands for them, emphasising products from family farms, linking economic freedom to political democracy, all formed part of a rational agrarian vision that stressed how yeomanry farmers tangibly contributed to political and economic national advantage. Committed to good stewardship himself, he believed an educated yeoman farmer who managed the land carefully

was the key to America's future, so an effective educational system was a means to develop leadership in common men. Economically independent farmers were less likely to be dominated by 'aristocratic or demagogic influences' in government (Kenyon 1971, 985-9). Jefferson's name continues to be synonymous with yeomanry and agrarianism wherever it is discussed ((Brooking 2019, 69). Family farms were integral to American agrarianism:

It assumed that the nation needed a large number of family farms, each endowed with the resources required for families to lead good lives. It stressed the importance of landownership. It insisted that a family farmer (who in most cases was male) must not be obligated to others such as landlords, must be free to do what he wished with this land and its products but should have no more land than his family could use. And family farmers deserved large roles in government and special attention from it (Kirkendall 1987, 81).

Hahn's study of the yeomanry of Georgia from 1850 found that both men and women protected their independence, abhorring the idea of hiring workers or using slaves; their 'egalitarian instinct' did not agree with rule over others. Farmers, mostly landowners, grew crops and livestock to the level of self-sufficiency with a few acres of cotton to either sell to buy what they could not produce, or to spin and weave at home. Those who had a trade served local needs as well as farming (Fields 1985, 136). These people were living life much as we have seen the yeomanry in England. Tenants gradually saved to buy their own land. Farmers had networks of exchange with local stores, ties that bound households together through mutuality and reciprocity that mediated unequal relationships. From 1850, this way of life was under pressure from increasing population and land needed to assist sons into farming. The civil war added further impositions, demonstrating their lack of political power because the planters held the power and advanced their own agendas (Fields, 137).

As common land rights disappeared and Emancipation occurred, these yeoman farmers were forced to engage with capitalist commodity production of cotton-growing, thus losing their independence and mutual support mechanisms, becoming eventually 'tools of the merchants' and in Texas, loss of commons created more dependence on lenders and landlords (Wilkison 2008, 165). Australian farmers experienced this process during the 1980s, when

commodity prices fell below the cost of production and processors dictated the price to producers, particularly in the sugar industry. Increasing powerlessness and poverty in Georgia's yeoman farmers planted the roots of Southern populism and its challenge to entrenched political power (Fields, 136-139).

In Texas, the traditional religious and cultural ties, and 'habits of mutuality' that had sustained the rural yeoman community up to the 1870s started to fragment, due to combined effects of intra-state-migrants increasing population, new railroads and national market access, which increased land prices beyond the reach of 'self-sufficient, but cash-poor, Texan yeomen' (Wilkison, 4-5). The yeoman perception was that tenancy was only for young getting established. Land ownership was seen as a 'badge of independent, mature manhood' and when this changed it qualitatively changed the 'plain folk way of life'. Wilkison wrote, 'within one generation, . . . under cotton's aegis, many would come to know the new poverty of propertylessness,' as a majority of yeoman farmers were reduced to tenancy and its accompanying 'geographical mobility'. Increasing poverty was evidenced by reduction in farm-family personal wealth (e.g. milking cows, hogs, machinery, wagons etc.) over forty years (Wilkison, 35-41).

Ford (1986) focussed on South Carolina to look at the effect on the yeomanry of the move to capitalist commodities. Echoing Rae's English analysis, 'safety-first agriculture' there in 1840 combined with the ethic of self-sufficiency that prevailed among the 86% of farmers who were yeomen. But, wary of growing dependency on cotton, by 1859 they were receptive to politicking that promoted the idea of a slave-holders' republic and secessionist ideals. A clear pattern emerges across the south of landowning farmers badly affected by capitalist commodity production, losing out socially, communally and economically, and sometimes becoming pawns of big money-lenders. Their lifestyle was under threat, in much the same way that English yeomanry had experienced after 1815.

Was it the same for yeomen in the Northern states? Attack looked at the period after the Homestead Act 1862 that granted 160 acres free to those who cultivated them for five years. English laws of entail and succession no longer applied by 1830 and land was available to the general masses (1988, 14). Owner-operated farms increased, promoted early by federal land policy. Farm ownership varied across the northern half of America but tenancy grew almost everywhere. The difference seemed to lie with wealth, yeoman farmers having the accumulated capital value in their land as well as a ‘superior income stream’(24). He concluded that rising tenancies from 1860 to 1920 indicated lack of capital and increasing land prices rather than lack of aspiration (32).

In summary, *American* yeomanry was characterised by mixed farming, using family labour generally, on farms of average 75-100 acres, self-sufficiency in labour and produce, supported by community networks of mutuality and reciprocity. They embraced landownership and wanted land for their sons; those able to keep land over generations accumulated capital gain in their land. We saw their identification with politics as a response to powerlessness.

In Australia too, Buxton, in the Riverina, and Bolton, in North Queensland, both discovered that yeoman settlers were politically alert and willing to represent their interests to politicians (Buxton 1967, 189, 191, 210; Bolton 1963, 146, 299, 302-5). However, both their studies contrast with those reviewed because their yeoman farmers operated a virtual monoculture environment, significantly different to those in England and in both the American North and South where the regimen of mixed farming with a focus on self-sufficiency in foodstuffs for livestock and family was the prevailing similarity.

In Tom Brooking’s 2019 study of the yeoman ideal’s longevity in *New Zealand*, he argued that it ‘lasted longer and achieved greater hegemony’ there than in Australia, Canada or the United States (68). Part of the reason was the domination of simple commodity production by family farmers despite the adoption of greater mechanisation and chemical and fertiliser use,

generally perceived as linked to industrial farming. In addition to highlighting ‘yeowomen’ and their farming partnership role, he emphasised factors across the period that made the difference, such as substantial political influence, leaders who were farmers, support of the Farmers’ Union, their asset gains during boom years, and their response to the recession of the 1920s. Brooking took his study into the twenty-first century, predicting ‘glimmers of hope’ in ways to manage current agricultural challenges and social perceptions of farming connected with land custodianship. This definite echo of the Jefferson ideal matches the ‘philosophy of kaitiakitanga, or guardianship,’ a feature of Maori communal ownership (75-91). His study presents support for the durability of the yeoman ideal in Castra and ways in which it was sustained.

Returning to Dingle’s point that understanding of the yeoman ideal was assumed, the range of characteristics I have identified helps to shed light on that assumption. The long history of yeomanry in England and America meant that immigrants from either country who came for mining opportunities across Australia well understood the status and appeal of the yeoman’s life on land he owned and worked with his family. The diggings provided some men with the capital to get started. Bolton identified this in North Queensland and Pike referred to the diggers’ race for land in South Australia (Pike 1962). Later, mining in Tasmania’s West helped fund some of the 1880s settlers into Castra.

Taking a different perspective was Belich’s 2009 study about the ‘settler revolution’ that happened between 1815 and 1915. ‘Booster literature’ provoked movement of emigrants to new frontier lands across the Anglo world. There were examples of a so-called ‘paradise complex’ in materials about New Zealand, Canada and America that encouraged people seeking a promised land to look towards those new frontiers. Belich argued that ‘settlerism’ promoted ‘a freehold family farm’ because of the perception that the shared desire of ‘common emigrants’ was to attain land of their own and become yeomen freeholders. To those in power, their being poor mattered less than being moral, sober and hardworking (Belich, 152-4; see

Tonts, 2002, 103-115). However, settlers were often prepared to compromise by taking on tenancy or a leasehold, using their capital to develop their farm and house; ‘the potential yeoman’ wanted ‘independence from masters, not markets’. The yeoman ideal became personalised, evidenced from letters to family (often wives) in England from American, Canadian and Australian migrants that showed the strong ties and loving relationships sustained by absent loved ones (Snell 1985, 9-14).

Who supported the yeoman ideal in Australia? Politicians were the most important people whose assumptions about the yeomen ideal and yeomanry attributes affected land settlement policies nation-wide. They needed their populations and economies boosted and saw the answer in the yeomanry’s reputation of industriousness, conservative values, productivity and stability. When the press counterpoised the yeomen as morally superior and physically stronger than radical urban elements, this acted to endorse land policies designed to establish small farmers and the attempt to subdue the powers of squatters and large pastoralists. Scholars consistently considered the political appeal of the yeomanry (Powell 1970, 1985, 1988; for all states, Roberts 1924; for Tasmania, Meikle 2011, 2014).

Merchants and storekeepers were also influential in support of yeoman settlers because increased density of people held prospects of profits and a stable demand in contrast to pastoralists’ itinerant labourers. Their businesses benefitted by offering credit and bartering produce (Waterson 1968, 164-181).

This review of yeomanry and the manifested yeoman ideal in Anglo societies has revealed a prominent theme – the transition from self-sufficiency to capitalist commodity production in a global economic system, and the influential effects of markets, politics and governments. In later chapters, I investigate how that process translated in the agricultural environment of Castra.

The yeoman ideal has been shown to be intrinsic to family farming, typified by the idea of the ties that bind – the shared beliefs – that link people together in settler societies. In rural societies, these ties were endorsed by Protestant church attendance, occurring often in hymns like “Blest be the tie that binds” by John Fawcett, written in 1818, and reinforced in Methodist evangelism of the early twentieth century by Reverend W. G. Taylor (Wilson 2011, 404). This key idea is highlighted in themes addressed in following chapters.

Chapter one sets Castra’s origin into the context of land settlement policies. The yeoman ideal was pressed hard politically in the quest to encourage population and productivity growth, so Colonel Andrew Crawford’s proposal to encourage long-served Indian officers to retire in Tasmania gained Government approval. I argue that Crawford implicitly subscribed to the yeoman ideal evidenced by his intentions and actions.

Chapter two examines surveying from state to local level because surveyors’ practices played such a significant part in frontier land settlement and survey decisions had long-lasting implications. I delve deeply into the way Castra was divided into 320- and 160-acre lots, followed by a qualitative examination of Valuation Rolls to analyse the longevity of ownership by the Anglo-Indian purchasers. My data makes a positive connection to the yeoman ideal and repositions perception of failure of Crawford’s Castra Association.

Chapter three moves to the 1880s period when demand for land by sons of small farmers in other areas of Devon was the stimulus for a new wave of farming selectors. I research their backgrounds and motivations, and introduce the earliest members of several multi-generational families who settled in Castra. Early development of community assets for religious, educational and social activities demonstrate support of the yeoman ideal and exemplify the Protestant work ethic.

Chapters four and five focus on two forms of settlement exercised by the Tasmanian government following examples set elsewhere. First, closer settlement filled spaces of potential

agricultural land unalienated in 1906 with purchasers. This was followed by settlement of soldiers after the Great War from 1917 onwards as government lessees. The success or failure of both these schemes have occupied historians across the world. Three areas of Castra were used for closer settlement. The ideology that yeoman farmers were politically, socially and economically advantageous provided motivation for closer settlement and it continued to resonate when the problem arose of resettling thousands of Great War returnees back into civilian life. The social agenda to enable men to go farming as a reward for their efforts in service overwhelmed the basic yeoman premise of private landownership and was adapted to fit with mixed results in consequence. I look in depth at more than thirty cases of soldier settlers approved to lease Castra farmlands to consider the validity of the yeoman ideal to this constituency. I show convincingly that the oft-cited story of failure was untrue in Castra. The returning soldiers embraced the ideal of a family farm of their own and eventual ownership (for many) supported by strong kinship and community ties.

Chapter six addresses how the aspiration of yeomen farmers to hand on their land to family members or help them establish themselves independently occurred in Castra families through various farm transition strategies of succession and inheritance.

Chapter seven fills a gap in historical work about rural children's lives. So often they are included in women's rural history almost in passing. Local biographies and personal interviews permit focus on ways children themselves were incorporated into the yeoman family farm labour structures, how work was integrated into their daily routine and how they gained a sense of belonging in place and nature. Sporting and other social activities in adolescence highlight community activity that sustained the ties binding families together as well as helping courtships that interwove kinship relationships. Eventually, locally-available social interactions became limited by the move to smaller families and the fewer children were encouraged to broaden their interests and ambitions beyond the family farm.



Chapter eight explores the lives of the “yeowomen” as Brooking called them. Since agriculture has typically been seen as masculine and because there is a gap in literature about Tasmanian countrywomen, I wanted to give value to their contribution. They were pivotal to the yeoman ideal as producers of ‘everyday’ income for family needs while the farmer supported the farm business. Those activities were impacted in the transition from simple production to capitalist commodity production, and how this issue was resolved in Castra is explored. I argue consistently that they were partners with their husbands in the family enterprise (contrasted with characterisations as ‘helpers’), in decision-making over inheritance, and their management of house, homestead production and family social life as well as being prolific mothers. Women were critical to creating the ‘social glue’ that bound the farming community together from the 1880s onwards. This was their endorsement of the yeoman ideal.

Chapter nine examines how Castra farmers pursued their political interests in the public sphere locally and in State and Federal arenas. Exercising political influence and participation was another characteristic of yeomen farmers, achieved through membership of organisations, being politically alert and willingly weighing up change carefully. The Castra community originated several significant political figures and many others who actively added their backing to campaigns and organisations supporting their agricultural interests, demonstrating yet another link to yeomanry characteristics. Their adoption of by-employment, as Beckett called it, and ways they had of working together formed an important part of the yeoman ideal.

My aim was to explore Castra’s uniqueness as an insightful window into comparable rural settlement communities in colonial-origin locations with temperate-forest environments. I sought to reframe ideas about the yeoman ideal to show that family farming was sustainable beyond self-sufficiency and well able to adapt to the capitalist agricultural economy over the twentieth-century.

For centuries people were motivated by the desire to produce food and occupy their own land – an intrinsic facet of the yeoman ideal best exemplified by farming families. Professor Brooking's timely work about yeoman family farming in New Zealand tells me that mine is not a cry in the wilderness. Future researchers may cast another eye over the social history of other rural locales in the Anglo world to build on this work.