'BOTTLED SUNSHINE'
The Birth of the Australian Dried Fruits Industry

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Abstract

Mildura, in northwest Victoria, is the hub of the dried fruits industry in Australia. This small agricultural industry has a remarkably interesting but little-known history. The development of the industry was due to irrigation (which resulted in environmental degradation), entrepreneurialism combined with powerful, persuasive marketing and the tyranny of the distance to markets. Soldier settlers, Alfred Deakin, Justice Henry Higgins and several cookbook authors all played their part. In its infancy, the industry looked to the United States for inspiration but then returned to its natural friends in the Commonwealth for help when markets were bloated and prices were low. Apart from two celebratory, anniversary publications, the history of the industry has been largely overlooked. This paper addresses this oversight by highlighting how the dried fruits industry has influenced some of the key themes and important events in Australia's cultural, political and legal history.

Keywords

Dried fruit industry, Australia, Irrigation Colonies, solider settlement, entrepreneurialism, dried fruit marketing, cookbooks, Mildura

Introduction

Prior to every Christmas in Western countries, you will find dried fruits in prominent positions on supermarket shelves. Australia, along with California (USA), Greece and

Turkey, is one of the largest producers of sultanas, raisins and currants. The dried fruits industry commenced in Australia in the 1880s. Apart from two popular publications written for the 75th and 100th anniversaries of the Australian Dried Fruits Association (Tregonning, 1962; Gange, 2007), little is known about the history of the industry. Yet it has been a player in some of the important social, political, legal and economic initiatives of the nation. The temperance movement, marketing to children and women, and the promotion of 'super foods' are some of the social changes that are part of its history. On the political-legal front, the industry played a part in the soldier settlement scheme, the formation of the Country Party, a constitutional challenge that went all the way to the Privy Council, an innovative public-private partnership and a ruling by Justice Higgins that entrenched wage inequality for women. Economically, it promised riches and sometimes delivered poverty, saw the bankruptcy of the industry founders and relied on high tariffs and protectionism. It is time this rich history received greater attention.

A Garden in the Desert Created through a Public-Private Partnership

It took the tenacity of Alfred Deakin and the audacity of two brothers to realise the potential of the Murray River for irrigation. Instead of looking to 'mother England' for agricultural inspiration, Deakin looked to California (where climatic conditions are more similar to those of inland Australia) and the enterprising work of the Chaffey brothers. George (an engineer) and William (a horticulturalist) had pooled their talents to pump water from the Santa Ana River and establish irrigated orchards over 3000 acres of southern California. When Deakin (then the minister for Public Works and Water Supply and the chairman of a royal commission into water supply in the colony of Victoria) saw their work firsthand in 1885, he convinced the government that this was the answer to the long drought that Victoria (and most of inland Australia) had endured since 1880. Marilyn Lake argues that Deakin was enthralled by American modernism and masculinity, which was partly why he sought to emulate their new irrigation systems (2007: 32). Jennifer Hamilton-McKenzie argues that it was Deakin's belief in the racial superiority of Anglo-Saxons that led him to ignore the older, tried and tested irrigation systems of Mexico, Spain and India, which would have been more suitable for the Australian inland (2012: 86). Despite contrary arguments and evidence from their own expert, George Gordon, chief engineer for the Victorian Lands and Water Supply Board, the government was seduced by Deakin's persuasive and heroic claims of turning

unproductive, unprofitable land into an oasis. In addition, the government was keen to decentralise Melbourne's expanding population and create employment for the men who had drifted into the city after the gold rush ended.

In 1886 Deakin negotiated a public-private partnership with the Chaffey brothers. In exchange for a grant of 50,000 acres of land on the Murray River, near Mildura, the Chaffeys were to spend £300,000 over twenty years in improving the land by clearing it, establishing irrigation infrastructure and an agricultural training college, and encouraging settlement by selling small holdings. A further 200,000 acres would be available to them at £1/acre if they fulfilled these initial undertakings. George Chaffey reconnoitred the tiny village of Mildura in 1886 and described it as "sterility on either bank with the river of life flowing between" (quoted in Gange, 2007: 1). In the harsh Mallee scrub, he could see a potential fruit bowl. Although the Victorian Parliament should have had reservations about this innovative public-private partnership based on the limited credentials of the Chaffey brothers—the fact that they had only developed 3000 acres in California, the lack of a drainage system to support the irrigation channels and the differences between the topography of California and inland Victoria (see Gordon, 1886: 109)—it was fear of foreign investment and foreign ownership of land that stalled the endeavour (Hamilton-McKenzie, 2013: 64, 73, 95). (Similar objections are made today about Chinese investors in the Australian property market; see Schwartz, 2016). Newspaper reports stressed that the brothers were British (they were in fact Canadian) and not originally from the United States of America (*The Argus*, 22 October 1886: 7). While the Victorian Legislative Council argued, in frustration George Chaffey approached the South Australian Government and negotiated and signed a similar deal for irrigating 250,000 acres near Renmark (also on the Murray River) in 1887. The contract with the colony of Victoria was finally signed on 31 May 1887 and the Chaffey brothers set about creating a garden of abundance. The region became known as 'Sunraysia' and Mildura was the unofficial capital.

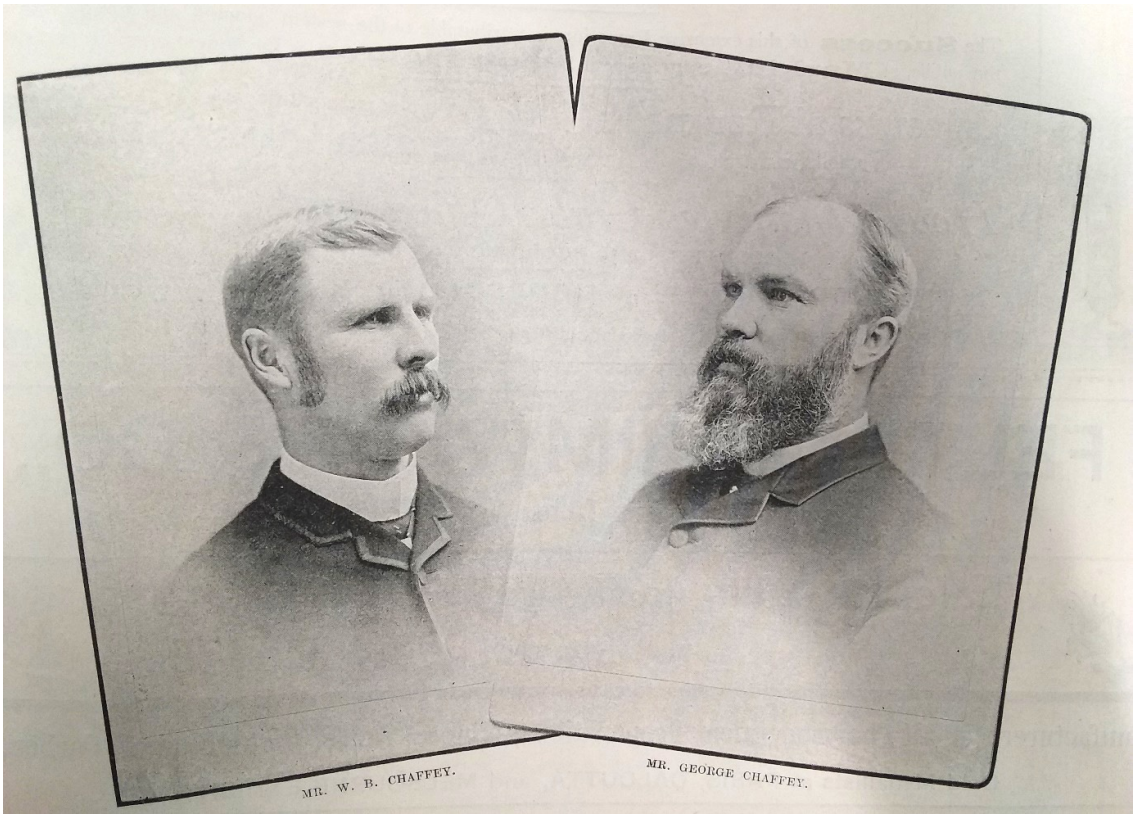

Figure 1: Portraits of William and George Chaffey (Vincent, 1888: 11)

The Chaffeys printed a large, impressive and expensive prospectus (29 cm x 39 cm, 126 pages) to entice new settlers to the 'Irrigation Colonies'. This was the prime tool of the 224 agents employed in England, Europe and the Australian capital cities to promote their scheme. Known colloquially as 'the Red Book' its pages gushed with hyperbole: "Judging from the average turbidity of the Murray waters…their fertilising value, therefore, can scarcely be exaggerated" (Vincent, 1888: 5). Its title page quoted D. Morris Esq., assistant director of the Royal Gardens, Kew: "From these sunny lands where our sons and daughters have made their homes, we shall draw our future supply of FRUIT, in quality and quantity probably exceeding that of any Fruit Industry the world has seen." No date was supplied for this quote and the "sunny lands" were assumed to be Australia. The newspapers, principally the *South Australian Register* and *The Argus* (Melbourne) (see 22 October 1886: 4) joined in the chorus claiming,

> *the first white man who ever saw the River Murray was enraptured with the possibilities for cultivation afforded by the river flats, and he prophesied concerning the teeming*

> *population that would be settled upon its course…with irrigation…[it will be] converted into an* immense paradise. [no emphasis added] (South Australian Register, 31 May 1887: 6, quoted in Vincent, 1888: 9)

This outrageous boosterism promised investors the ideal of yeoman farming, where profit and plenty would surely follow hard work and ambition. The rhetoric worked. By the end of 1889, 6000 acres had been sold at Mildura and by 1890 the fledgling town had a population of 3000 people (Grange, 2007: 11). *The Australian Irrigation Colonies* and Alfred Deakin persuaded readers that a single male farmer could support a family and realise an average annual profit of $1000 (American) on just a ten-acre farm (Vincent, 1888: 69, 112). Ten acres of cleared land, ploughed to a depth of 18 inches with unlined irrigation channels could be purchased at Mildura for £200 over a ten-year period (Grange, 2007: 12). However, real estate speculation and competition pushed the cost of blocks in the best locations up to three times their original price (Grange, 2007: 7). By March 1888 the Chaffeys could not keep up with the demand for land, which had been prepared for planting, so they sold land in its natural state for a lower price with an undertaking that they would install irrigation channels (*Mildura Irrigation Colony*, 1888: 4).

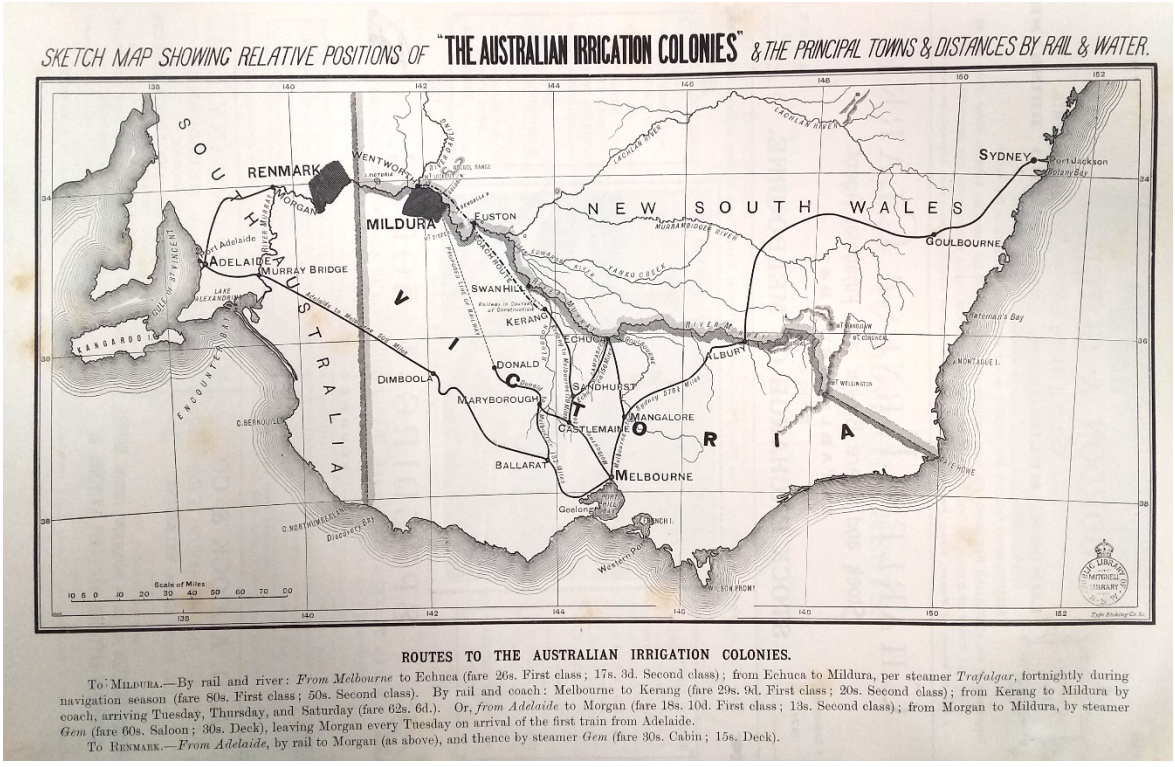

Figure 2: Map showing the location of the 'Irrigation Colonies' (Vincent, 1888: xi)

With the scrub cleared, a grand settlement was taking shape. The Chaffeys laid out a town with a wide, tree-lined boulevard named Deakin Avenue (after the venture's political champion) as its spine, running eight kilometres south from the river pontoon. Using a grid system, which reflected their American influences, avenues ran north to south and sequentially numbered streets crossed east to west. A post office, bakery, general store and school were built by the early 1890s. As a sign of his confidence and stature, William Chaffey built the grand, three-storey Rio Vista mansion in the Queen Anne style with wide river frontage from 1889 to 1891. It is currently being restored as a house museum using state government and community funding (*Sunraysia Daily*, 2017: 129).

Part of the Chaffey brothers' vision for Mildura was that its settlers would not be to be too inebriated to work. In the 1880s, after the excesses of the goldfields, the temperance crusade was gaining momentum. The Chaffey brothers did not allow drink to be sold and consumed on the same premises, but liquor could still be purchased at general stores for consumption at home (*South Australian Register*, 21 May 1887: 7). The first hotel, built in 1889, was the Mildura Coffee Palace; it was not granted a full liquor licence until 1919 (Discover Murray, 'Mildura Grand Hotel', n.d.). Paradoxically, at the same time as trying to thwart the development of a drinking culture in Mildura, William Chaffey planted a wine vineyard in 1888, produced his first vintage in 1891 and built a distillery in nearby Merbein in 1904 (Grange, 2007: 16; Discover Murray, Merebin, n.d.). Grapes that were unfit for drying or excess were sent to the wine presses.

While the government and hopeful settlers followed the prophets of inland irrigation, not a thought was given to the local Paakantyi and Latje Latje peoples. They are depicted in some of the illustrations by J.M. Needham in *The Australian Irrigation Colonies*, usually in pairs and in a romantic fashion (Vincent, 1888: 5, 13, 25, 33). The implication was that only a small number of Aboriginal people would be displaced and that their spears, bark canoes and primitive lifestyles must make way for the progress of steam-powered boats and pumping engines. Reverend Dr Thornton, the bishop of Ballarat, did notice "an aboriginal lubra" doing the washing for a family when he visited Mildura in March 1888 and inexplicably blamed the "extinction of our blacks" on their "excessive fondness" for their dogs (*Ballarat Star*, 3 April 1888: 3). Over 60,000 years of Aboriginal history and land use were dismissed through the land grant to the Chaffeys. Their plans for irrigation colonies at Renmark and

Mildura radically altered the natural ecology of the Mallee country and the flow of the Murray, thereby removing Aboriginal sources of food such as fish and Mallee fowl.

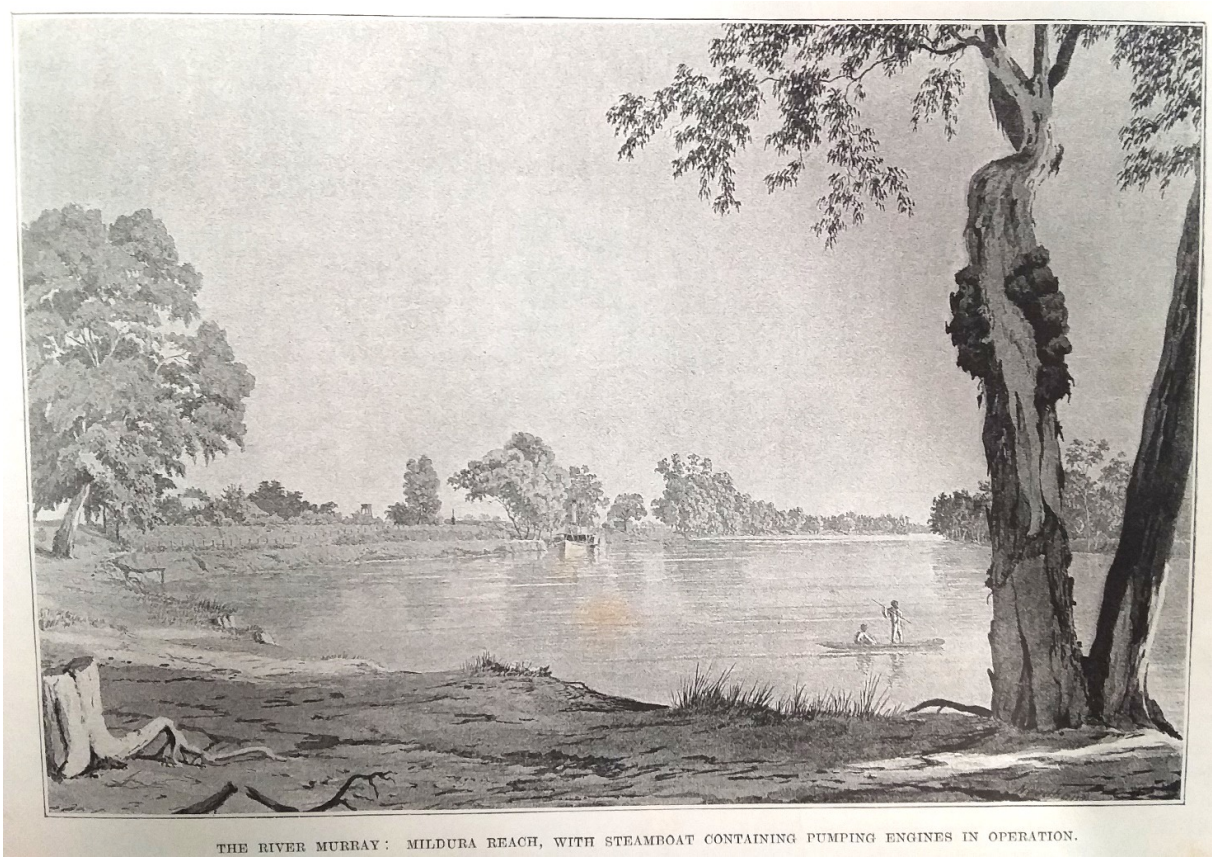

Figure 3: Illustration of the Mildura Reach of the Murray River showing steam boat with pumping engines and Aboriginal men fishing in a canoe by J.M. Needham (Vincent, 1888: 5)

In the timeless cycle of speculative economic development, bust inevitably follows a boom. By 1895 the infectious optimism of the irrigation experiment had dried up like the waters of the Murray. Low rainfall and five years of pumping water out of the Murray River system had reduced it to a chain of waterholes. It was no longer effective as a transport route for getting produce to markets in Melbourne and Adelaide. The promised railway extension from Swan Hill had not arrived. Delicate fruit was sent to the railhead via bumpy roads with a horse and cart. It took a week to reach Melbourne, by which time it was overripe, bruised and ruined (Gange, 2007: 19). Farmers who had worked hard to plant, grow, harvest and pack their crops were denied their profits. The dried fruits industry developed by default as the most reliable and practical way of getting fruit to markets on the coast. But the Chaffeys had not set up any infrastructure for a dried fruit industry. The irrigation channels, which

they had constructed to the highest point of each allotment, were shallow and sandy, causing most of the water to evaporate or seep away before it reached the crops. Land that had been irrigated was not well drained and, as George Gordon, an experienced water engineer predicted in 1885, salination was becoming increasingly destructive (Gordon, 1886: 120). The bank crash of 1893 and economic depression of the early 1890s saw land prices plummet. This spelt disaster for the Chaffey brothers as they relied on land sales to finance their promised land improvements. The two companies they had set up—Chaffey Brothers Limited and the Mildura Irrigation Company—went bankrupt. Farmers felt duped and demanded answers and assistance. Half the farmers who had arrived in Mildura in the first four years (1887–1891) had lost their investment of £200 or more and abandoned their land and dreams of a yeoman livelihood (Gange, 2007: 23). Those who could, sold up and headed to the West Australian goldfields where they felt they'd have a better chance of making a fortune (Gange, 2007: 19).

Shocked into action, the Victorian Government established a royal commission in 1896 to find out why the Chaffey companies had failed (the South Australian Government did the same in 1900 when their Renmark settlement collapsed) (Hamilton-McKenzie, 2013: 73). The royal commission was scathing of the business model, financial practices and duplicitous claims of the Chaffey brothers. However, it also criticised the Victorian Government for failing to adequately supervise and monitor their investment and for naively trusting the 'clever Americans'. Nevertheless, the royal commission recommended that the government should not abandon the venture but should loan the Mildura Irrigation Company funds to line the channels to prevent seepage and invest in a drainage system. Mildura's fruit farms continued and growers banded together to form the Mildura Raisin Trust (and the Renmark Raisin Trust) and help each other improve drainage and prevent frost damage (Gange, 2007: 20). In 1907 these two organisations combined to form the Australian Dried Fruits Association (ADFA) to protect growers' interests. George Chaffey was chastised, but not chastened, by his ten years in Australia. Even the brutal and unequivocal conclusions of the royal commission could not dent his self-confidence. He returned to America to start another inland irrigation project in Colorado, using the same marketing strategies he had used so successfully in Australia. Hamilton-McKenzie argues that George Chaffey was a better salesman than engineer (2013: 77). William Chaffey chose to stay in Mildura and became an advocate for growers. These events—the collapse of grandiose schemes,

disillusioned settlers losing their investments and abandoning their farms and charismatic entrepreneurs with expensive marketing initiatives—would be repeated 30 years later.

Soldier Settlement and Selling Super Foods

In 1916, 20 years after dried fruit prices plummeted to a penny a pound, the growers who persevered and stayed in the Irrigation Colonies were rewarded with prices as high as £60/ton for four crown grade sultanas (Gange, 2007: 62) and even £130 on the London market (Seers, 1948: 21; Gange, 2007: 65). Established vineyards were selling for upwards of £300/acre (purchased as bare land for £20/acre only 30 years earlier). This was during the midst of the First World War, when the main producers of dried fruits—Greece, Turkey and the United States—could not get their produce to overseas markets. Another outcome of the First World War, which also had a dramatic impact on the dried fruits industry, was soldier resettlement. After the industrial carnage of the war, the Australian government wanted to help the men who returned forget their traumatic experiences and start a new life. The Commonwealth and state governments worked together to create the soldier settlement scheme. The policy rationale of the soldier settlement scheme was that liberal doses of sunshine combined with hard, honest work, and the knowledge that the settlers could control their own future by making a living off land that was theirs would help these damaged men make a successful transition back to civilian life. This scheme was not open to Indigenous servicemen. They had to watch as their land was granted to the white men they had served with; even though they were the descendants of the original inhabitants of the land, they were not entitled to it.

Birdwoodton, just west of Mildura, was the first subdivision in the region with 23 allotments assigned on 13 February 1917 (Hall, 1918: 3). There were over 1200 applications from hopeful soldiers who wanted a piece of land, sunshine and profit. This prompted the government to buy 33,000 acres from the liquidators of the Chaffey companies and set up the settlement of Red Cliffs (so named for the colour of the cliffs on this reach of the Murray River), to the south of Mildura (*Ballarat Star*, 30 December 1919: 3). Between 1920 and 1923, the Victorian Government granted 700 allotments with an average size of 15 acres to ex-soldier-farmers (Seers, 1948: 8). Most settlers were eligible for low-interest loans of £500 (increased to £625 in 1919) to assist them to establish their farm, build a house and help them

live until they profited from their first harvest (Hall, 1918: 3; Repatriation and Demobilisation Department of the AIF, 1919: 8–9). However, the promise of living comfortably off what one could grow did not always match the reality. Most of the allotments needed to be cleared of trees and scrub, fenced (to keep out the rabbits), ploughed, planted, fertilised and watered. Dried vine fruits (grapes) were the main crop. Providing sufficient vine cuttings for these blocks was a huge undertaking, and a vine nursery, staffed by ex-soldiers, was established to propagate three million cuttings. Ex-soldiers were also employed to build roads and dig irrigation channels, clear the land and construct trellises, drying racks and packing sheds (Wright, 1995: iii). Some blocks were so remote that they had no houses, roads or access to running water. Figure 4, a photograph of an early settler at Red Cliffs, shows just how primitive living conditions were for some of the early settlers.

Figure 4: Mrs Martin cooks outside on a soldier settlement block in Red Cliffs, 1922. The structure on the left appears to be an outdoor toilet. (Photograph courtesy Museum Victoria, MM5332)

Vines grown from cuttings do not produce a harvest until three years after they are planted (Knight 1966, 8). 'Blockies', as the soldier settlers became known, tended their vines in the early 1920s, and harvested and processed them for market from 1923. Production nearly doubled, resulting in a glut of produce on the market, and, predictably, prices plunged. In 1923 prices dived from an average of £80 per ton to £30 per ton for dried fruit (Seers, 1948: 21; Chief Secretary's Office, 1925: xvii). The 700+ soldier settlers in the Mildura district watched the price of dried fruit decline and wondered how they were going to repay their debts. Even Rev Thornton, who knew more about theology than economics, was asking, in 1888, "where the market will be found for all the fruit that will be raised" (*Ballarat Star*, 3 April 1888: 3). Some farmers decided it was better to feed their unprocessed vine fruits to cows and pigs, rather than pay to have it dipped, dried, sorted, packaged and transported only to make a loss. Thirty years after the economic depression of the 1890s, when the newly established dried fruits industry had faced a similar crisis, the high prices and hungry markets of previous years had been replaced by record low prices and a bloated market.

The state and Commonwealth governments had to find markets for the excessive amount of dried fruits, or confront the assessment that they had consigned returned soldiers to toil in an unprofitable industry. There were two main markets for Australian dried fruits: the international and the domestic market. From the commencement of the industry, well into the 1950s, nearly 80 per cent of Australian dried fruits were exported overseas. The main buyers were countries in the British Empire—principally New Zealand, Canada and the United Kingdom—because they agreed to impose high tariffs on dried fruits imported from non-Empire countries (where labour and transport costs were lower). The UK imposed tariffs of £2/ton on currants and a hefty £8/10 on sultanas and lexias (raisins). Canada, which could purchase dried fruits from California, slapped an import duty of four cents/pound on currants and three cents/pound on lexias and sultanas. New Zealand added £7/ton to lexias and sultanas but imposed no duty on currants (Seers, 1948: 18).

Import duties increased prices, so consumers had to feel good about spending money on dried fruits and Australian dried fruits in particular. The Empire Marketing Board was established in London in 1926 to encourage people to 'buy Empire'. It produced a range of posters as marketing propaganda, two of which focussed on dried fruits. This full-colour poster has a relaxed farmer in the centre tending to his irrigation channels. It exudes health,

vitality and happiness through its use of colour, a sun-drenched vineyard and an abundance of water. It would appear that all is well in the farmer's world.

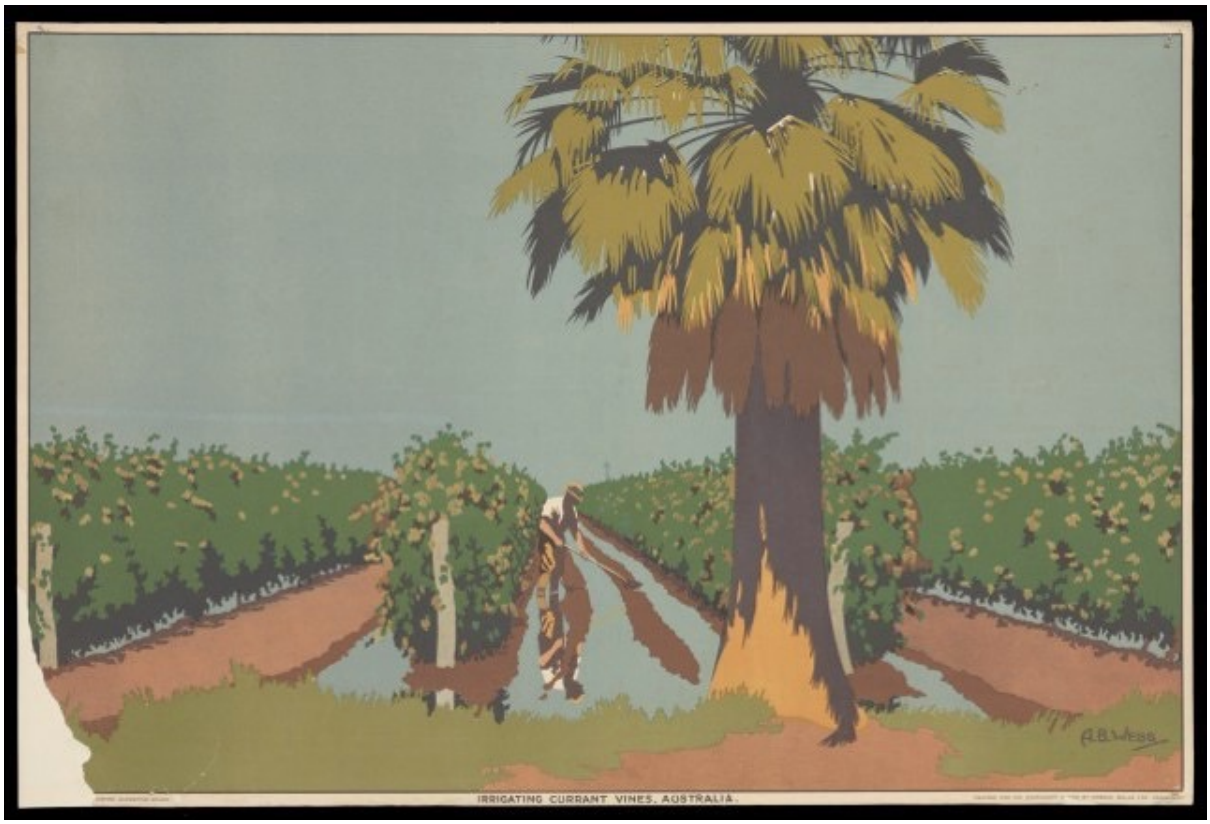

Figure 5: Archibald Bertram Webb, c. 1927, Irrigating currant vines, Australia, London: Empire Marketing Board. Print on paper, W 759 mm x H 506 mm. NMA, 2004.0073.0004.

Another poster, by an English graphic artist Frederick Herrick, was part of a series of posters featuring the fauna of empire countries. It shows how the kangaroo came to represent Australia and how the British viewed and understood Australia in the 1920s. It is an early example of 'brand Australia'—a more stylised kangaroo persists on the green and gold 'Australian made' label today. Australian sultanas might be more expensive but if they are promoted by a strong kangaroo and her joey, then who could resist?

Figure 6: Frederick C. Herrick, c. 1926, Buy Australian sultanas*, London: Empire Marketing Board. Print on paper, W 503 mm x H 760 mm, NMA, 2004.0073.0002.*

The annual report of the Dried Fruits Control Board (Australia) for 1928 states that £25,000 was spent on marketing Australian dried fruits to Britain in 1927–28 (7). This might seem excessive, but it is important to note that before prices fell (due to the oversupply of the market), the Australian dried fruits export industry was worth between £3 and £5 million annually (*The Gippsland Times*, 1932: 3). In addition, the livelihoods of thousands of soldier settlers on farms in WA, SA, Vic and NSW were now resting on the success of the dried fruits industry. Despite the efforts of the Empire Marketing Board and the high tariffs, in 1928 only 20 per cent of the dried fruit imported by the UK came from Australia.

The other market for dried fruits was the domestic one. In the 1920s Australians were, according to H.D. Howie, one of the highest per capita consumers of dried fruits in the world, consuming 4.75 pounds (2 kg) per person, just less than New Zealand at 5.6 pounds (2.5 kg) per person/year (1928: n.p.). This equates to eating 50 of the small 40-gram boxes of

sultanas that you can buy in supermarkets today, or one box every week. However, other reports said that Great Britain consumed 25 pounds per head per year, and people in the United States ate 16 pounds per person per year (*Weekly Times*, 1919: 11).

Nevertheless, Australians were still consuming less than one fifth of the 72,300 tons of fruit produced in the early 1930s (*The Horsham Times*, 1932: 9) and less than one third of the 20,000 tons produced in 1920 (de Garis, 1920: 3). To protect the domestic market, a duty of six pence per pound was imposed on all imported dried fruits (Seers, 1948: 18). Prior to the glut of fruit produced in the harvests of 1923 to 1926, a shortage of shipping space in 1919 (due to troops returning from the First World War) meant that boxes of dried fruit were rotting on the wharves (McCalman, 1981). The state-based dried fruits associations realised that they were too reliant on the British market and looked for new ways to boost domestic sales.

Enter entrepreneur and salesman Jack de Garis. At the age of 25, he convinced ADFA to give him a budget of £20,000 to run an American-style publicity campaign to increase sales of dried fruits. His aim was to double the Australian consumption of dried fruits from four to eight pounds per person per year (*Weekly Times*, 1919: 11). De Garis had grown up in the Sunraysia district where his father, an ex-Methodist minister, struggled to support his family through his market garden business and packing shed. When he took over the Sarnia Fruit Packing Company Ltd at the age of 17, he trebled its sales (McCalman, 1981; *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 1926: 4). Though only 150 cm tall, what he lacked in height, he made up for in confidence, charm and charisma ('Clement John "Jack" de Garis', n.d.).

De Garis believed the low Australian consumption of dried fruits was due to general ignorance of its food value and lack of available information about the products (*Weekly Times*, 1919: 11). Despite having identified these reasons for low sales, he took a scattergun approach to publicity. His marketing strategies would have raised the profile of dried fruit, but not necessarily their consumption. However, no one could doubt his creativity or his energy. In January 1919 he launched a nationwide competition calling for poems, short stories, limericks and acrostics about dried fruits, which would be included in a children's fairy book. From the 1358 entries, 15 stories and 80 poems and limericks were selected for publication and a share of the £100 prize money. The hardcover, 68-page *Sun-raysed Children's Fairy Story Book* sold for only two shillings. De Garis claimed it would "appeal to

the imagination of Australian children, and…provide them with wholesome, enjoyable reading matter…about an important Australian Industry" (De Garis, 1919: 3). De Garis had three children and was cognizant of their "pester power" (*Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 1926: 4).

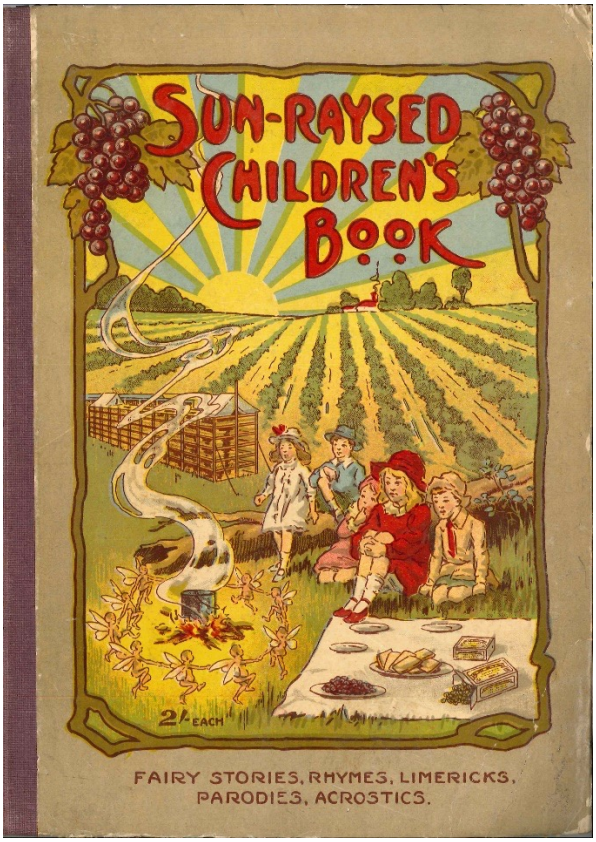

Figure 7: C.J. De Garis, ed. (1919) Sun-raysed Children's Fairy Story Book *(cover), Melbourne: F.W. Niven and Co.*

With funds at his disposal, de Garis organised several national competitions with cash prizes. In the first competition, 1500 people gathered at the Olympia Theatre in Mildura in April 1919 to watch four reputable members of the community carefully weigh four pounds of dried fruit and then seal the package. People were invited to guess how many berries were in the package and send in entries to win cash prizes totalling £2,500 (*The Chronicle*, 1919: 30). The package, which was deposited in the Bank of Victoria, Mildura, was broken by three justices of the peace on 11 August, the berries counted and the winners announced (*Westralian Worker*, 1919: 5). Unlike the traditional 'guess how many jellybeans are in the jar' competition, the winners did not win four pounds of dried fruit.

The next competition saw smaller cash prizes but a wider distribution of Sun-raysed marketing collateral. Prizes of £15 and £10 went to the first two entrants from each of the six states who could guess what the letters 'S B S' stood for. The winning answer was gradually revealed in the newspapers as people correctly guessed each of the 'magic words'. Every entrant had to send in one shilling, for which they received a selection of Sun-raysed merchandise, such as the Sun-raysed Waltz sheet music, a Sun-raysed kettle holder, a dried fruits recipe book, or a Sun-raysed war medal souvenir. As the owner of the *Sunraysia Daily* newspaper (based in Mildura) from 1920, de Garis could use his paper to publicise the competitions and his staff to draw cheques and post out the merchandise (McCalman, 1981). The magic words were finally revealed as 'Sun-raysed Birthday Stunt' on 10 April 1920. The competition received good media attention as over 120 newspapers across Australasia announced the winning words. *The Murray Pioneer and Australian River Record* (a weekly newspaper printed in Renmark, SA) even delayed its publication date so that it could announce the competition solution on the first day it could be printed (*Murray Pioneer and Australian River Record*, 1920: 4). De Garis claimed in his annual report of 1920 that the competition received 33,000 entries and that 50,000 merchandise articles were distributed to the kitchens, nurseries and drawing rooms of Australian homes (3).

The next competition encouraged people to send in an entry form with receipts for their purchase of three pounds of dried fruits, or three, one-shilling cartoons of 'Good Little Normey' confectionery with the date of their birth. The person with the most popular birth date (based on the entries received by 30 September 1920) and the person who sent in the most entries for that date, would receive £1000 in cash. Even though the prize money was far more substantial, this competition received fewer entries than the previous one. De Garis claimed that it still boosted the sale of dried fruits, which was the primary objective (1920: 4).

The 'Normey' was a lolly made from crushed and crystallised dried vine fruits. Manufacturers experimented with adding peach, pear, apricot and prune flavours to it and coating it in chocolate. Knowing the laxative properties of dried fruits, they also developed a lolly called the 'Sun-raysed laxette', which de Garis thought would be an international bestseller (1920: 4). However, the health benefits of dried fruits were not restricted to relieving constipation. De Garis is credited with composing a popular jingle which claimed that their consumption would also cure Spanish Influenza, a disease that was rampant in

1919: "I fear no more the dreaded flu, for Sun-raysed fruits will pull me through" ('Clement John "Jack" de Garis', n.d.).

As part of his extensive publicity campaign, de Garis collaborated with popular composer Reginald Stoneham, who wrote 'The Sun-raysed Waltz' to accompany de Garis' promotional lyrics. "There's a joy that is mine, eating fruits from the vine" had dance hall crowds swooning.

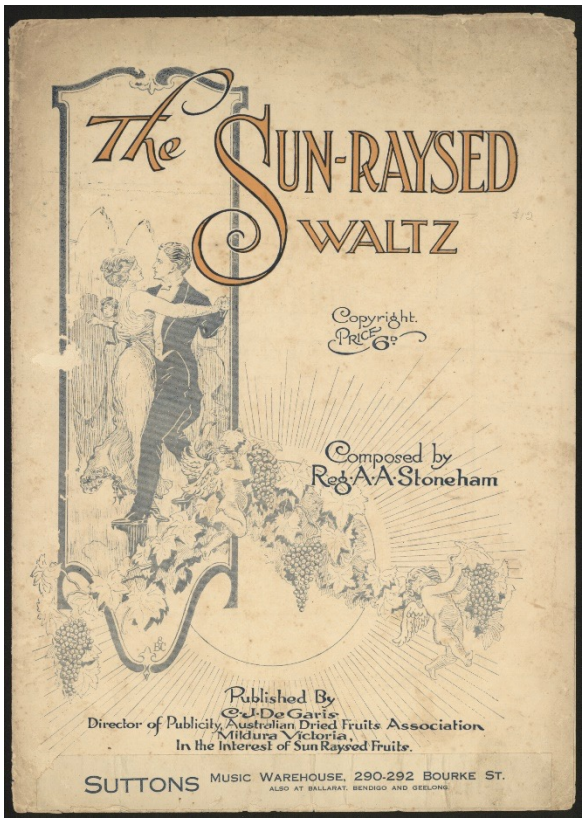

Figure 8: Reginald Stoneham (1920), The Sun-raysed Waltz, *sheet music (cover), Mildura, Victoria: C.J. de Garis, Director of Publicity, Australian Dried Fruits Association.*

Even the sky wasn't the limit for de Garis. An amateur pilot, he plastered advertising on his well-publicised, record-making flights from Melbourne to Perth in 1920, and the following year from Mildura to Sydney and onto Brisbane (*Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 1926: 4).

Figure 9: Jack de Garis promoted Sun-raysed dried fruits on his aeroplane while indulging his passion for flying, c. 1920 (de Garis 1925: 217).

There is no doubt that de Garis' campaigns did boost domestic sales, but not to the extent required to catch up with production. In the early 1920s, the ADFA changed its focus from national competitions with cash prizes to commissioning and promoting dried fruits cookery books. They promoted the cookbooks by publishing weekly recipes in the local papers, and encouraging readers to "send to the Victorian Dried Fruits Board" for a free cookery book (*Healesville Guardian*, 1930: 6).

One of the first cookbooks to be given away was *A Sunshine Cookery Book*, which contained 50 dried fruits recipes "for the modern table". In the mid-1920s, the Victorian Dried Fruits Board commissioned Miss Flora Pell, who, by 1924, was the inspectress of domestic arts centres throughout Victoria, to write this specialty cookbook. Miss Pell had been a domestic arts teacher in Victoria for nearly 35 years and her textbook, *Our Cookery Book*, and *Miss Flora Pell's Tested Cookery Dishes and Valuable Home Hints* (1925) were relied on by women throughout the state (Wishart & Wessell, 2010). She had a regular segment on Melbourne's 3LO radio where she discussed cooking tips and domestic economy, and her ideas were presented in the "Women to Women" column of *The Argus* by her friend "Vesta". Pell was on the airwaves, in the papers and in print—she may have been Australia's first celebrity

chef (Wishart, 2010: 11)! As a trusted, high-profile cookery teacher, the fact that Miss Pell compiled the recipes would have increased the take up of *A Sunshine Cookery Book* in Victoria.

Figure 10: Flora Pell (c. 1926) A Sunshine Cookery Book*, Melbourne: Victorian Dried Fruits Board (cover).*

Pell's foreword to *A Sunshine Cookery Book* was patriotic and moralistic. "Housewives" were urged to remember that

> *by making daily use of these appetising and nourishing fruits, you will not only be building up your own health, but will be assisting in maintaining a valuable national industry with which the successful repatriation of large numbers of our returned soldiers is inseparably bound up.* (Pell, c. 1926: 1)

Food choices were political, even in the 1920s. Mothers were also encouraged to do their duty by their families, and feed them "bottled sunshine" as the "remarkably high food value of raisins makes their use every day and for every meal a real economy, brightening the

home with the blessing of health" (Pell, c. 1926: 1). Today we would apply the term 'super food' to these sorts of nutritional claims.

A Sunshine Cookery Book was published in at least two editions with different cover designs and was a popular success. This prompted the Australian Dried Fruits Joint Publicity Committee to commission an expanded sequel—*The New Sunshine Cookery Book for Every Housewife* contained 100 recipes for sweet and savoury dishes using dried fruits.

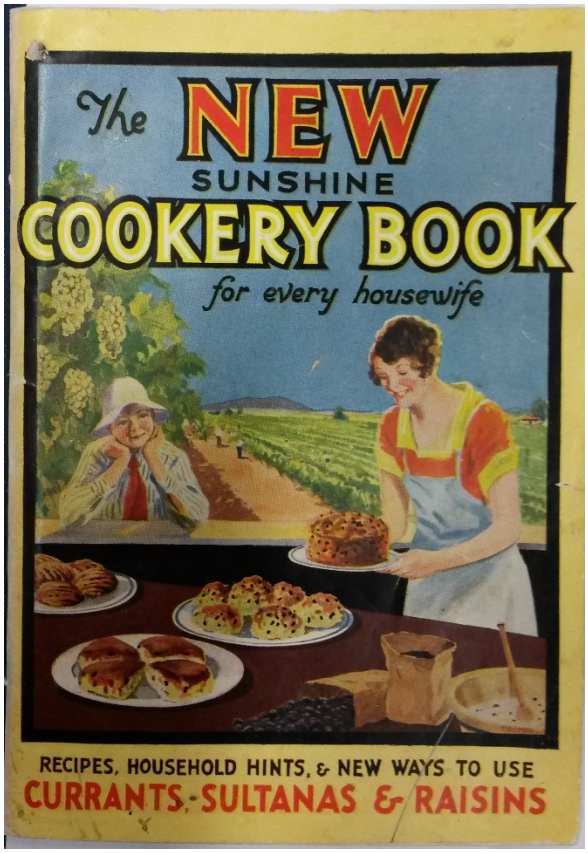

Figure 11: K.E.A. Balfour (1932) The New Sunshine Cookery Book*, Australia: Australian Dried Fruits Joint Publicity Committee (cover).*

The New Sunshine Cookery Book was written by Mrs Balfour, not Miss Flora Pell—why? Part of the answer is that Mrs K.E.A. Balfour was the wife of the chairman of the Victorian Dried Fruits Board. But the largest part of the answer lies in the fact that Miss Pell included "1 gill of brandy, wine or rum" (about 118 ml or half a metric cup) in her recipe for "birthday or wedding cake" in *Our Cookery Book* and was trounced by the Women's Christian Temperance Union for doing so (Pell, c. 1920, 2nd ed: 204). This recipe, containing "a little

brandy which enables the sauce to be kept for a length of time", ultimately brought Flora Pell's 35-year teaching career, and reputation as a best-selling cookbook author, to an end in 1929 (Wishart, 2010: 16). In the prohibition era, the proscription of alcohol trumped the promotion of dried fruits. Forty years after Mildura was established as a partial temperance town, the anti-alcohol movement was again asserting its power.

At least three other spin-off cookbooks with similar recipes were also produced and given away by ADFA: *Sun-raysed: Dried Fruit and Raisin Recipes; Cookery Book: Dried Fruits Specialties* and *Family Fare with Currants, Sultanas and Seeded Raisins.* Cookbooks were given away to each of the 300 people who attended an ADFA lecture about the dried fruits industry at the Palais Theatre in St Kilda, Melbourne, in August 1932 (*The Gippsland Times*, 1932: 3). Using dried fruit in cakes became so popular in Australia, especially when the price of dried fruit was so low, that Australian cooks invented a shortcut. Barbara Santich argues that the boiled fruitcake (where butter is melted and added to the dry ingredients, instead of creamed with the sugar first) was an Australian derivation, and that recipes for boiled fruitcake first appeared in the *Australian Sunshine Cookery Book* in 1939 (Santich, 2012: 209).

Unfortunately, the valiant marketing strategies initiated by the Empire Marketing Board, Jack de Garis and ADFA failed to rescue the industry from unprofitability. (It wasn't until the Second World War, when farming and markets were disrupted again, that prices increased.) Many farmers could not manage to make enough money to feed their families and pay off their debts, so they walked off their farms. By 1925 nearly one-fifth of Victorian soldier settlers had left their land. The proportion of farms abandoned in other states was similar (Garton, 1996: 126). Marilyn Lake estimates that four years later, by 1929, one-third of Victorian soldier settlers (the state with the largest number of soldier settlers) had walked away from their failure to reap a profit (1987: 114). Sometimes they sold the furniture or tools that they had purchased with loans and took the money to try and make a new life. Some failed farmers suicided (Wright, 1995: v; Lake, 1987: 237). If the war didn't completely break them, then the harsh realities of living off the land, in a fickle climate with plummeting produce prices, sometimes did. In Mildura, 30 years after the collapse of the dried fruits industry in the 1890s, history was repeating itself.

Just as the Victorian and South Australian Governments had ordered royal commissions into the failure of the Irrigation Colonies in 1896 and 1900, respectively, about 30 years later the Commonwealth government instigated two separate inquiries. In 1926 the prime minister asked the Development and Migration Commission to investigate the dried vine fruits industry and to make recommendations to "place it on a better footing". How was it possible that, despite the high tariffs placed by Canada and Britain on imports of dried fruits from California, the United States was managing to more than double its sales markets in those two countries? Australia was the third-highest producer of sultanas and lexias (raisins) and the second-highest producer of currants in the world in 1926, yet it could not secure markets (Development and Migration Commission, 1927: 5, 6). The commission calculated that if growers with an average size holding of fifteen acres had a yield of one ton/acre, at current prices (of £35–£45/ton depending on the type and grade of fruit) they would make £126/year or about £2/10 per week (ibid: 24). This return was only just higher than what the adult male pickers (who were paid one shilling an hour) received in weekly wages. The commission recommended an overhaul of the industry by drastically reducing the number of inefficient packing sheds from 88 to 12, cutting out the 71 selling agents operating in the United Kingdom to increase returns to growers and fostering cooperation and sharing of equipment and resources between growers (ibid: 46, 47). After an initial injection of funds to modernise packing and processing equipment, this should reduce the costs of producing dried fruit by an estimated £4/ton (ibid: 47). However, this news came too late for the soldier settlers who were struggling to make a living.

In 1929 there was a Commonwealth Inquiry, led by Justice George Pike, into the failure of the soldier settlement scheme. The inquiry found four reasons why the scheme had failed: the small size of some of the land holdings, the lack of capital, the drop in value of primary produce (particularly in irrigated areas), and the unsuitability of the soldier-settlers to farming (Pike, 1929: 23). The six states which participated in the soldier settlement scheme sustained total losses of £25,525,522, with the largest deficits being in Victoria followed by New South Wales (both over £7 million) (ibid: 6). By 1933 the soldier settlement scheme was such a disaster in Victoria, the state with the largest proportion of soldier settlers, that the government passed legislation to allow it to write off debts and *pay* failed soldier settlers up to £100 to leave their land and start again (Lake, 1987: 234). By enacting this legislation, the Victorian Government was admitting that their soldier settlement policy was not only a

tragic disaster, but counterproductive—it had made life worse for returned soldiers, not better. While some politicians sought to blame the soldiers for their inefficiency on the land, 'blockies' understood this payment as a vindication of their efforts. It was not them, but the soldier settlement scheme that had failed.

Some soldiers fought back against the governments that had promised them a life of rural bliss but delivered heartache and poverty. All over Australia, they started forming Soldier Settlement Leagues and Digger's Unemployment Committees to protest their plight. They also lobbied the sub-branches of their local Returned Servicemen's League. These angry soldier settlers joined with other disenchanted farmers to form a new political party in 1923: the Country Party (Garton, 1996: 129). This party is still alive today in the form of the National Party.

The Dried Fruits Industry and Landmark Legal Cases

Justice Henry Higgins is best known for his 'Sunshine Harvester Judgement' of 1907, which introduced the concept of a basic living wage for men. However, another landmark ruling by Higgins in 1912 also had a profound and lasting effect on the Australian wage system, this time by entrenching the gender pay gap. John Rickard (1983), Higgins' biographer in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, fails to mention his significant ruling on 'The fruit-picker's case', which commenced in the Irrigation Colonies of Mildura and Renmark. As president of the Commonwealth Court of Conciliation and Arbitration, Higgins decided not to uphold the application from the Rural Workers' Union and South Australian United Labourers' Union for equal pay for women. Instead, he went "against his own judgement" and ruled in favour of the growers, who wanted to discriminate between male and female rates of pay (*Daily Telegraph*, 1912: 7). Higgins ordered that women should be paid the same rate as men when they were doing 'men's work', or competing with men for work (such as fruit picking). However, when they were doing 'women's work' (such as fruit packing), they should be paid less, as the woman did not have a legal obligation to maintain her family (*Rural Workers' Union*, 1912 6 CAR: 62). He set a rate of nine pence per hour for female fruit packers and one shilling (twelve pence) an hour for male fruit pickers over the age of eighteen. Higgins thought that women were more suited to packing fruit due to "their superior deftness and suppleness of fingers" (ibid: 72), but he did not think their financial

obligations were as onerous as men's (who had to support a family) and so set the minimum rate at three-quarters of a man's rate of pay (*Daily Telegraph*, 1912: 7). Higgins' judgement directly affected the 2000 workers who were then engaged in seasonal fruit work in Renmark and Mildura, and set a precedent for future wage disputes concerning the "problem of female labour" (*Rural Workers' Union*, 1912 6 CAR: 70; *Bendigo Independent*, 1912: 6).

The dried fruits industry was involved in further groundbreaking legal action from 1928 to 1932. This was initiated by a South Australian-based grower and wholesaler of dried fruits who, like Jack de Garis, was short in stature but tall in confidence and passion. Frederick James took over his family's dried fruits business in 1910 but refused to join ADFA and abide by its quota system. During the 1920s, when there was a glut of fruit on the market due to the trebling of production from soldier-settlers, the state-based dried fruits boards introduced a quota system to limit the amount of dried fruit that growers and packing sheds could put on the domestic market. This was supposed to share the profits in a tight market and keep the prices artificially high (Howell, 1983).

James not only grew his own crop in Berri (on the Murray River just south of Renmark), but also paid cash to purchase high quality fruit from needy soldier settlers in the Riverland who were struggling to pay their debts (*The Argus*, 1928: 11). His strict quality controls meant that his fruit, which he marketed under the Trevarno brand, received a high price. When ADFA, acting through the South Australian Dried Fruits Control Board, tried to restrict his 1926 quota to a mere 136 tons, he rebelled and sold an additional 240 tons to dried fruits brokers in New South Wales and Victoria. In 1927 the South Australian Board seized the fruit he was trying to sell and brought a lawsuit against him (O'Brien, 1992: 44). James fought back, declaring their actions unconstitutional and suing for damages. James was very familiar with the Australian Constitution as he had taught himself to type by typing it out multiple times. He knew that section 92 of the constitution said that trade and commerce between states should be "absolutely free". When the Commonwealth Dried Fruits Control Board tried to control sales to domestic markets as well as the international market, James invoked section 99 of the constitution, which said that Commonwealth regulations could not discriminate between the states. James became a serial litigant. He was involved in 28 court cases to protect his business and assert his right to sell as much dried

fruits as he could. The legal actions brought wealth, fame and promotion to his Berri-based lawyer, Kevin Ward (Howell, 1983). They also led to new laws, a referendum to amend section 92 of the constitution in 1937 (which was defeated) and appeals that continued until 1936 and went all the way to the Privy Council (O'Brien, 1992: 47–58; *James v The Commonwealth* [1936]). The two celebratory histories of the dried fruits industry refer to James as a meddlesome ratbag, not a crusader for anti-protectionism and the free market (Grange, 2007: 86; Tregonning, 1962: n.p.).

Conclusion

Today the Australian dried fruits industry is still based in Mildura and returns $26.75 million to growers annually (Dried Fruits Australia, n.d.). Only some of the 500 growers harvesting vines on 8,648 irrigated acres in the Sunraysia region would be aware of its tumultuous history (Dried Fruits Australia, 2016: 1). As this article has shown, the industry has intersected with some significant events in Australian social history, such as the temperance movement, agricultural expansion through irrigation, displacement of Aboriginal people, soldier settlement and the birth of a national political party. The dried fruits industry was one of the first to focus on the nutritional value of the food, to appeal to buyer's social conscience and to direct their marketing to women and children. It benefitted from the exuberance and lateral thinking of some colourful characters—the Chaffey brothers, Jack de Garis and Frederick James. The industry also left its mark on Australia's legal system through wage discrimination and appeals to the constitution. The ADFA celebrated its centenary in 2007 and changed its name to Dried Fruits Australia in 2011 to underline its transformation into a 'modern organisation' (Dried Fruits Australia, n.d.). But in a nod to the past, it promotes on its website a recipe for the 'Good Little Normey' sweet, which looks remarkably like recipes for one of the latest nutritional crazes: protein balls. Next Christmas, when you notice packets of dried fruits proliferating on supermarket shelves, I hope you will remember that the dried sweet morsels have a history as rich as the fruitcake they make.

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