**Beecroft Land Clearance 1887**

**Sydney Morning Herald (NSW: 1842 - 1954), Friday 25 February 1887, page 9**

THE UNEMPLOYED.

A deputation of the unemployed waited on the Colonial Treasurer at 11 o'clock yesterday morning. Besides the Treasurer there were present-the Minister for Works, the Principal Under-Secretary (Mr. Critchett Walker), and Mr. J. W. Deering (metropolitan district surveyor, Department of Lands). The deputation consisted of Messrs. Sutton and McCormack, who represented themselves as a deputation from the unemployed.

Mr. McCormack advocated a daily rate of payment of 6s. to be guaranteed for 12 months for the unemployed. In fact, he demanded it; whereupon the Minister stated that to far as demanding it was concerned, the Government did not require their services at all; that if the unemployed obtained work, it must be upon the terms offered by the Government. Mr. McCormack's manner was insulting, and instead of advancing his cause he entirely ruined it by his audacious demeanour. Mr. Sutton, the other delegate, expressed himself as wholly differing in his views and aims from Mr. McCormack, and stated that he, on behalf of a large number of men, was content to accept work which was to be paid for by results. It was evident that this man represented the true and respectable portion of the unemployed. The Ministers stated that work should be offered at once to those who were willing to do it at a fair and reasonable price; and, in the meantime, they should receive rations.

The Government have appointed Mr. Deering to take sole charge of the unemployed in respect to the clearing of several estates which are shortly to be offered for sale at public auction. This work will enhance the value of those lands. This officer has been endowed with full powers to act in every way that he may think proper, and to undertake any expenditure he may think necessary. Mr. Deering stated that he would at once put a large number of men to work at clearing that portion of the Field of Mars which has been laid out as the village of Beecroft, the land at the Beecroft platform, and the whole of the Field of Mars Estate, containing about 3000 acres, which has recently been subdivided for sale. To this end the unemployed were requested to meet at the immigration barracks at 3 o'clock in the afternoon, and on Mr. Deering's arrival at that hour he found some 600 men assembled. Mr. McCormack, one of the members of the morning deputation, was addressing the crowd, urging the men not to take piece-work, but to demand 6s. per day. The gates of the barracks were thrown open, and the men were invited to enter and give their names for work to be done at the Field of Mars Commons, but only some 86 men complied with the invitation. Very shortly afterwards, when Mr. McCormack had ceased to harangue the men, about 60 more gave in their names, making in all a total of nearly 150 who were willing to accept industrial occupation. The 400 or 500 so-styled unemployed who remained outside, derided in insulting terms all Mr. Deering's Invitations to accept the forms offered, and Mr. Deering informed them that if they would not work, neither should they eat at Government expense. Those men who have engaged to work are to be found with tents and the necessary implements, but they will have to provide their own blankets and cooking utensils. The price to be given for clearing the land will depend upon the nature of the timber and scrub, the scrub and all timber of 12 inches in diameter to be cleared off, with the exception of ornamental and shade trees, which will be allowed to remain. The men will be able to earn fair wages at the work, and the outlay, itself, will prove reproductive. It is expected that rations will be supplied to the men, by Mr. Kidman, at 1s. per head per diem, as at the Kurnell relief works; but, of course, this will be deducted from the earnings of the men. The men were asked by the officer in charge whether they would rather ration themselves or pay 1s. per day to the contractor, and they unanimously agreed to the latter. Those of the men who were industriously disposed expressed their thanks for the kind consideration shown by the Government by giving three cheers. At a later hour Mr. Deering interviewed the Minister for Works and the Commissioner for Railways, who agreed to issue railway tickets to the men once a fortnight, upon pay day, at the nominal rate of 11d. per mile return. The object is to enable the men to visit their homes on the Saturday, and, after spending the Sunday with their friends, to return to the works on the Monday morning.

One of the unemployed, who " intends to be at work on Monday," writes to say that the position taken up by Messrs. McCormack and Co., who have assumed to be the leaders of the unemployed, is a false one, as they do not represent the real unemployed, who are desirous of having work, and who have not the slightest sympathy with the utterly absurd, bombastic, threatening, and insulting conduct manifested by this crew of agitators. He. remarks, "I say that the sooner we have fresh leaders the better for us, and then we shall be listened to respectfully by the Government, as well as by others who are desirous of assisting us out of our difficulties. I shame to think, and seem to have it said, that I have any sympathy with the tomfoolery which was exhibited at the Immigration Barracks gates, because Messrs. McCormack and Co. could not by their only tongues persuade men not to accept the offers of the Government. They hooted and boo-hooed every man who had courage enough to break through their ranks and enter his name to go to work on Monday. Such conduct will do the men who want work no good, and I would strongly advise the unemployed to have nothing whatever to do with such men as the McCormack's gang, who I believe only want work upon their own terms and conditions."

**Sydney Morning Herald (NSW: 1842 - 1954), Wednesday 9 March 1887, page 5**

WORK FOR THE UNEMPLOYED.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE HERALD.

Sir,- Anyone who has taken a trip to Hornsby during the last few days could not but help noticing the large number of unemployed camped at Beecroft platform. These men are being engaged in clearing the scrub and undergrowth off this portion of Field of Mars Common. Of course this work will have a beneficial effect on the value of this property when it is offered for sale by public auction; but I question whether the Government would not be spending money more advantageously by putting the unemployed at works of a more permanent nature. The construction of a siding at Beecroft would prove of inestimable benefit to the district, for it would not only allow the settlers in the vicinity to send their produce to Sydney by rail, but it would open up a small industry by wood-cutting and timber splitting. The construction of this siding, and the making and forming of one, or two good roads to the platform, would add more to the value of Government land than merely clearing the undergrowth and scrub, and would, moreover, prove of lasting benefit to the district.

I am, etc.

Sydney, 8th March.

C. C. T. [Charles Churchill Tucker]

**Sydney Morning Herald, Tue 28 Jun 1887**

PARLIAMENT OF NEW SOUTH WALES

At Beecroft the unemployed had cleared 100 acres of land, and had cleared and stumped 20.½ miles of road, and had formed 8.¾ miles.

**Sydney Morning Herald, Fri 11 Nov 1887**

THE WORK OF THE "UNEMPLOYED."

The Premier has received from the chairman of the Casual Labour Board (Mr. John Davies, C.M.G.), a report containing some interesting particulars regarding the work performed by those who some months ago were unemployed in Sydney. The work carried out by these men is likely to prove highly re-productive. It appears that 23,611 acres of land have been cleared and under-scrubbed, that 162 miles 4 chains of roads have been cleared; that 54 miles & 7 chains of roads have been formed; that 11 miles & 40 chains have been cleared, formed, and made; that 10 miles & 16 chains of drains have been cut, that 14 bridges have been constructed; and that 29 culverts have been formed. There are now 12,848 acres of the lands that have been cleared available for sale. The total sum paid in respect of the work done by the " unemployed " up to the present amounts, we are informed, to £92,000.

The particulars given regarding the work show that at **Beecroft** 3259 acres have been cleared and under-scrubbed; that 27¾ miles of road have been cleared, 11¼ miles formed, one bridge constructed, and four culverts formed. The whole of the land put up for public auction realised £42 per acre, being about double the upset price as fixed by the

Minister for Lands.

At Carlingford 1717 acres of land have been cleared and under-scrubbed, 41 miles of road cleared, 32 miles formed, two bridges and 13 culverts have been constructed, and six crossings formed.

At Gordon 3375 acres of land have been cleared and scrubbed, 11¾ miles of road cleared. Clearing and under-scrubbing and clearing for road formation are in progress. At present 1275 acres are available for sale; but the remainder has yet to be surveyed.

At Dobroyd, 80 acres of land have been cleared and under-scrubbed, the whole of which is now available for sale, and from its position and the fine roads that have been made through the ground, it should have a ready sale and command high prices. Seventy-six miles of road have been cleared there, and stone drains and culverts have been formed.

At French's Forest, 9¾ miles of road have been cleared and 7½ miles formed. The forming and metalling of main roads are being proceeded with, and the construction of culverts and drains is in progress. No less than 1328 cubic yards of metal have been broken to 3in. gauge for main roads. 3000 acres of land are surveyed and ready for sale, and 3500 have yet to be surveyed.

At Hornsby 235 acres of land have been cleared and scrubbed, and 6¾ miles of road have been cleared, and two culverts formed.

At Hunter's Hill 54 acres of land have been cleared and under-scrubbed.

At Little Bay Hospital 400 acres have been cleared and under-scrubbed, and 95 yards of drains have been cut. The whole area cleared has been mattocked and planted with grass and ornamental trees. Wells have been made and various other works performed about the grounds. 100 loads of ironstone have been collected and broken for repairing the roads.

At Narrabeen 822 acres have been cleared and under-scrubbed, 10 miles 42 chains of road have been cleared, 3 miles 32 chains formed, 24½ chains of drainage have been cut, and one culvert is in course of construction. Tenders are being received for culverts, stone-breaking, and pipe culverts. 2500 acres of Crown lands will be available for sale here, and land is likely to realise high prices.

At the National Park 12,559 acres of land have been cleared and under-scrubbed, 56 miles 1 chain of roads cleared, and 9 miles 25 chains of roads cleared, formed, and made. 10 bridges and culverts have been constructed on the Waterfall-road and 9¾ miles of drainage cut. 718 acres have been mattocked, 400 acres planted with grass—couch, rye, clover, and cocksfoot; 420 acres laid down in useful and ornamental shade trees. One large dam has been made for military purposes, and one large reservoir constructed for watering horses. At Rookwood 1100 acres have been cleared; 300 acres have been fenced off for the Boys' Reformatory; 42 acres are held for a water reserve. The remainder of the ground, 758 acres, has all been cleared, with the exception of 66 acres abutting on the Liverpool-road, which on account of the timber is advised to be left as a timber reserve. The land that is available for sale has been splendidly cleared, and from the position it occupies should realise very high prices and command a ready sale. £350 per annum has been offered for the right to graze sheep on the cleared land.

**Sydney Morning Herald, Sat 17 Mar 1888**

STATE RELIEF HOUSE.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE HERALD

Sir, - Our respected and septile Premier has, in spite of the opinion of the country dead against him for a State House, persevered into deluding himself into the want of it. I would humbly beg to suggest that he may possibly be coaxed into an amendment concerning it, that it be called the "State Relief House," as a headquarters for the destitute, from whence they could be sent to quarters where their services could be utilised. That a system of relief similar to that in England is thought to be coming here sooner or later is commonly indulged in, but with this difference, that in England there was no land to reclaim, and the ratepayers were taxed at the same rate whether rich or poor, while out here the conditions of utilising relief works for the starving classes is decidedly in favour of the non-taxation of the inhabitants of the colony, and a chance of the Government being assisted to pay a slight portion of its colonial debt from the sale of lands.

I now perceive that it is the intention of Government to make a tramway to the Field of Mars. Last year when I was out there, I pointed out that such a work should have been carried out before the roads were made. Large areas of land were cleared of trees and scrub, which was all burnt instead of being taken up to Sydney and sold for firewood, which is now retailed at 20s. per ton. The amount realised would have paid the expense of a tramway between Ryde and Beecroft stations, and the prices realised by the sale of the land would have been greater through the introduction of a tramway; but being only an obscure individual myself, my ideas were snuffed out of existence.

1 am, &c.,

J B. WATTS

**Daily Telegraph (Sydney, Fri 12 Oct 1888**

THE UNEMPLOYED.

WHERE THEY ARE WORKING AND WHAT THEY ARE DOING.

910 NOW EMPLOYED.

A LARGE QUANTITY OF LAND MADE AVAILABLE FOR SALE.

To many people it may be a matter of surprise that we have still a large body of men for whom work is being found by the Government. Not much more than a year ago, and whom the tide of depression then passing over the colony was probably at its lowest ebb, a great deal was heard of the distress among the laboring classes and painful evidence was given of the reality of the cry that went up for aid by the number of able-bodied mechanics that were to be seen about the parka and in the streets. The Government stopped in and provided work at the National Park, the Field of Mas and elsewhere for those who wore willing to accept a wage of about four shillings a day. A great many availed themselves of the opportunity, and those that were, genuine in their clamor for aid being thus for the time provided for there was nothing for the Domain loafer and the refuse of George-street to lay hold of, and they sank back to their old pernicious laziness out of which they had been temporarily roused.

As will be remembered, what is termed the Casual Labor Board was instituted and to this board was entrusted the work of regulating the employment for those in distress. This board have been working quietly, but they are able to present a very creditable report of what has been done under their supervision during the past 14 months. Most of this work has been of the nature of clearing for sale Crown lands in the county of Cumberland and forming and making roads over them for facility of settlement. Jn the period named there have been cleared and stumped 31,689 acres of land, 307 miles of roads have been cleared, 174 miles have been formed and 46 miles formed and ballasted. On these roads 175 bridges and culverts have been constructed. The roads are not blind ones, as they give access to the main public roads and to station platforms on the Illawarra, Peat's Ferry and Northern railways. They make available for sale 43,763 acres of Crown lands, some of which has already been disposed of at good prices, and all of it will probably be sold at no distant date. These figures arc sufficient to show that the work done by the men has not been altogether of that useless character certain members of Parliament now found in the Opposition shades would have us believe.

Some details of the land ready for sale will be worth giving. On Saturday next 300a. out of 752a. available and situate at Rookwood are to be sold. It is believed that they will realise from £200 to £300 per acre, the land being good and at no great distance from the city. At Dobroyd 60a. will shortly be sold and it is anticipated that the land will be readily saleable at £150 an acre, this being the average received for about 200a. of it parted with five months ago.

There are 3000a. ready for auction at **Beecroft**, the price received for land in the vicinity previously realised on being £45 an acre.

On the 27th of this month about 400a. out of 1000 available at Hornsby will be submitted for public competition, £60 an acre being the price that it is anticipated will be received for the land. At Carlingford 2895a. are prepared for sale, £45 an acre being the sum set upon this property, while at Heathcote a similar rate is expected to be received for 222a. available there. At Camp Creek, on the Illawarra railway, there are 3840a., and as land adjoining has been recently disposed of for £100 an acre it is hoped that this price will be forthcoming when the land is put up to auction. I About 600a. of land at Gordon will be sold on October 26. This laud is close to the Pearce's Corner railway, and the quantity previously disposed of brought about £40 an acre. For 3000a. at Berowra, on the Hawkesbury railway, £9 an acre will probably be obtained, and for 6500a. at French's Forest in the Manly district, £20 an acre is desired. This price will also, it is believed, be secured for 10,500a. at Narrabeen, over 2000a. of which is to be sold on November 1. This land is intersected with roads, and a wild scrub has been made fit for human habitation. If the whole of the land available as the result of the labors of the "unemployed" under the direction of the Labor Board were sold it is believed that as much as £1,540,000 would be obtained, besides securing further settlement of the hitherto waste lands in the Cumberland County. This sum does not include 4200a. of land on the Illawarra-road towards Liverpool, which is not yet ready for the market.

Beside the work of clearing and forming, some important sanitary works have been carried out in the locality between Leichhardt, Camperdown and Petersham— a locality where typhoid has had a rare show. In place of the old creeks that were largely receptacles of the sewerage of the district a well-made concrete sewer has been built, and itis claimed that since this work was done the deaths from typhoid have been materially reduced. One other work which has been more of ornament and of future benefit than of present utility may be mentioned, and that is the sowing of about 2000a. of the National Park with grass seed.

A feature in connection with this “unemployed” work is the steady decrease since June of last year of the number of men engaged. At that period there were as many as 5000 men at work; at the present time there are not 1000, the exact number being 910. From time-to-time men are taken from the works and put in the way of obtaining more remunerative employment elsewhere. The Government have all along sought to make this "unemployed" work as little attractive as they could. They do not wish to affect the labor market, and the sooner the men find labor worthy of their hire the better satisfied will they be. It has been the object to supply those employers of labor who apply to the board for men with suitable men, and during the 14 months referred to 1700 men have thus been enabled to find permanent work, the 4s. or 6s. a day having been sufficient to enable them to tide over the temporary difficulties induced by hard times lessening the demand for labor. The 910 men now employed are distributed as follows: Leichhardt Park, 20: Heathcote, 20; Sutherland, 70; Bulgo, on the Illawarra railway, 75; . Hornsby, 85; Ryde, 25; Cook Park, 130; Waterfall, 60; Camp Creek, on the Illawarra line, 55; Woronora-road, 50; Narrabeen, 250; Rookwood, 17; Bankstown Common, 30; Bankstown roads, 25.

The men earn on an average about 4s. 6d. a day, and from this sum 3s. 3d. is deducted for rations. The work done is serviceable, and while, perhaps, in most cases not immediately necessary it is held that none of it has been useless, and the cost has been considerably less than would under ordinary circumstances have been the case. This year the vote for "unemployed" work amounted to £80,000. Of this sum it is stated that between £60,000 and £70,000 will have been spent by the end of the year. The vote next year, if unfortunately it should be found necessary to take another one, should be much reduced.

Next to those employed at Narrabeen the greatest number of men are now employed at Cook's Park. This park is situated on the western shores of Botany Bay. In its original state it consisted of a number of low-lying sandhills, with patches of bracken and grasses that favor a sandy soil covering them. These sandhills formed by the action of the prevailing winds blowing from the sea were continually being added to, and in many cases their presence spoilt an otherwise magnificent beach. It has been the work of the hundred and more men employed on the park to level the hills and so prepare the beach that an extensive marine drive may be formed upon it. The park extends for a distance of between four and five miles following the bay from the mouth of George's River, round by Sans Souci and Sandringham on to Cook's River. There is a width throughout of 100ft., but a portion of the reserve which is to be known as the Esplanade is much wider. The part upon which the unemployed have been engaged comprises a distance of 2.½ miles from Doll's Point towards Sandringham on the south, to New Brighton pier on the north, and the work so far as levelling the sand-hills is concerned will be completed in a month's time. The land is being settled at an average height from high water of about 10ft, the bank at the sea side is to be turfed, and a road 30ft. wide will be formed in the centre of the drive. When completed it will be one of the finest drives in the colonies. The number of men now at work on this spot is 100, these being under Mr. H. T. Saunderson, C.E. The men work in gangs, most of them of eight each, and are paid by piecework at the rate of 6d. per yard. For the fortnight ending Saturday last the average pay, after deducting 1s. 1d. for rations, was 4s. 2. ½d.; for the previous fortnight it was 3s. 11.½d.; and for the one prior to that it came to 3s. 9d. per man. Many of the men are married, but their wives and families reside in town, while they themselves live under canvas, tents being supplied them, but they providing their own blankets. They work on an average eight hours a day, which includes a quarter of an hour each at 10 and for smoking. The work is not particularly heavy and the men seem to be satisfied under the circumstances with the wages received. It has been the care of Mr. Sanderson to weed out the lazy and worthless, those given to tiring and to otherwise misconduct themselves, and he has now a lot of good steady fellows able and willing to earn a livelihood, even though a somewhat meagre one. They are happy, as they say, to get anything honest to do and thus enable them to keep the enemy from the door.

**Illustrated Sydney News (NSW: 1881 - 1894), Monday 16 May 1887**

THE UNEMPLOYED

Our present “Unemployed" sketch portrays operations at Beecroft, Field of Mars, and comprises views of:

**The Arrival of Stores (a day’s supply) at Beecroft**



**The Commissariat**



**The work of Clearing**

A black and white drawing of people cutting trees

Description automatically generated