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**Pastoral History Learning Program**

*Outline of Learning Program*

Length of Program: 1.5 – 2 hours

Maximum no. of students: 35

No. of accompanying adults: 1 x 10 students

*Timetable*

Welcome and Introduction (10 mins)

Overview of Lanyon Pastoral History (20-25 mins)

Overview of Geikie Management 1970s to present (15-20 mins)

Divide into three groups (5 min)

Rotations of homestead, outbuildings and Within Living Memory exhibition (45-60 mins)

Conclusion (10 mins)

*Overview of Lanyon Pastoral History 1835-1970s Notes*

Lanyon is a ‘composite artefact’, a museum precinct that is not representative of one set timeframe of human occupation or decade or century, but a site of continuous human occupation from pre-European settlement through to the present day. The land surrounding the museum precinct is a working farm business that continues to support a second generation lease-holder family.

There are seven sequential eras to Lanyon:

Aboriginal occupation to 1820;

Exploration and contact history 1821-1834;

Wright era 1835-1847;

Cunningham era 1848-1926;

Osborne era 1926-30;

Field era 1930-1970; and

Public era 1971 – present day.

There was, of course, Aboriginal occupation of this valley prior to European settlement. Investigation of the Birrigai rockshelter on the western side of the Murrumbidgee has so far established Aboriginal occupation, land use and ceremony within the area as at least at 21,000 BP. Studies have recorded evidence of continuous occupation of Ngambri/Ngunnawal families in this part of the country. Situated between two river crossings the later site of Lanyon had for generations been a gathering place for Aboriginal people travelling to the Tidbinbilla mountains. European settlers displaced the local Aboriginal people but it seems that some Ngambri/Ngunnawal people found adaptive means not only to survive but to remain close to country and retain ceremony. Some worked at Lanyon, possible as gardeners although other skills were appreciated, such as working with horses, tracking and shearing.

Exploration of inland NSW followed the crossing of the Blue Mountains in 1813. In October 1820 Charles Throsby led an expedition for Governor Lachlan Macquarie to inspect the country around Lake Bathurst and Lake George, some 50 or so kilometres north-east. Throsby arrived some three years later with others and reached the Limestone Plains-Murrumbidgee area. Previously beyond the frontier, in 1829 the area became the frontier and it didn’t take long for occupation to follow.

A number of pastoral properties had been established in the region prior to the lodging of an application by John Lanyon and James Wright on Lanyon in 1934 on what was regarded as valuable pastoral and agricultural land, given its access to fresh water. In fact, it is likely that Lanyon and Wright were already living at Lanyon prior to the application, living in huts left by previous occupants. An orchard and vegetable garden had been established on the banks of the river, close to a hut labelled “Hurst’s Sheep Station”. In 1836 Lanyon returned to the UK to be with his dying father. Wright retained the use of Lanyon’s lot and purchased 4,790 acres over a period of six years, increasing the acreage from the 2,320 first purchased.

Wright continued establishing Lanyon with the help of convict labour. The first convicts assigned to Wright were listed in 1835, and from then until 31 December 1837, 35 servants had been assigned. Transportation to NSW ended in 1840 and the assignment finished on 30 June 1941. As you will discover, convict buildings remain on the property.

As well as the orchard and vegetable garden, Wright had a wheatfield. An inventory in 1839 recorded 400 cattle, bred primarily for local consumption of meat, milk, butter and cheese, but Lanyon was a sheep property and wool its primary product and we know from records that Wright felt threatened by the presence of catarrh in neighbouring stations and the dumping of sheep in the Murrumbidgee River. Farming was difficult with a shortage of labour and in 1838 Thomas Locker, who had building skills, was brought out from the Wright family estate in Derbyshire to Lanyon under the ‘bounty emigrant’ policy. Various cottages and outbuildings followed, with Locker directing the convicts.

In 1841 there were an estimated 4,000 sheep, 400 cattle, 18 horses, 24 working bullocks and six pigs at Lanyon. The NSW census on 2 March 1941 recorded 59 people living at Lanyon which included convict labourers and immigrant workers, but excluded Aboriginal workers. In an isolated location, Lanyon had to be run as a largely self-sufficient operation.

The colonial prosperity of the 1830s dried up with the prolonged drought of 1838-1844 and the steep drop in the return for Australian wool. Lanyon was affected by both and by the depression of the 1840s when Wright lost the station he established. On 1 January 1849, Andrew Cunningham purchased the Lanyon homestead block and by 1863 he had purchased all of Wright’s land plus additional property in the area. Lanyon remained Cunningham property for the next 80 years.

Jane and Andrew Cunningham and their family moved to Lanyon in 1849. Their substantial new homestead was completed in 1859. Lanyon’s staple was its fine merino wool and the station became a symbol of Australian prosperity, with its orchard and gardens, 60,000 sheep, wheat paddocks and fine horses.

Brothers Andrew Jackson Cunningham and James (Jim) Cunningham jointly ran Lanyon and nearby Tuggeranong after the death of their father. In the 1890s the colony suffered another bout of depression and drought but the Cunninghams continued improving the properties. In 1896, they installed steam-powered mechanical shearing equipment at Tuggeranong. The modernising continued with both Lanyon and Tuggeranong being divided into paddocks, with rabbit-proof wire netting fences.

World War 1 was a watershed for the pastoral industry and, after then, Lanyon’s prosperity began to decline. James and Mary Cunningham did not live at Lanyon after World War 1. Their sons Andy and Pax, who had both served in the war, were resident but neither the house, nor the gardens, nor the property thrived.

In addition, the location of the Federal Capital Territory was decided in 1908, and various properties in the region were resumed. Lanyon was not. Nevertheless, the reality of Commonwealth acquisition of land was a disruption to them, uncertain of their future and their dissolving social circle. After subdivision in 1926, Lanyon was sold as six separate parcels, with the homestead and main working property of 9,688 acres brought from James Cunningham’s estate by Harry Osborne, a brief phase in Lanyon’s pastoral history.

Osborne bought Lanyon for his son Paddy as ‘relief country’ with pasture for only 3,000 sheep but sold it abruptly the following year. The whole of the property was in stasis during the Osborne’s ownership. They suffered heavily under the implementation of local ordinances for pasture protection and Lanyon became a shadow of its earlier showplace status. The sale in 1926 to the Osbornes was also a blow to local families who had worked there for several generations.

When Tom Field bought the property from Harry Osborne in 1930, it became part of his wholesale meat enterprise T A Field & Co. On his death in 1944, his son Tom succeeded as owner. Under the direction of Tom Field and his son, Lanyon became a star property among the company’s extensive pastoral holdings. With systematic planning under a succession of capable managers, the Fields provided the funds and expertise to make Lanyon a showpiece once more.

The appearance of the property changed dramatically under managers Jim Martin (1930-39) and Bert Edwards (1940-53), with extensive clearing in the hilly country for new paddocks, pasture improvement throughout the property, a windmill that brought water from the river in the 1930s, dam-building, irrigation of the river flats for lucerne, and new farm buildings and workers’ cottages. The rabbit-proof fences were rebuilt to completely enclose the reduced area of the former station. The homestead was transformed with new gardens, tree-planting and landscaping, as well as renovation of the house. The Fields also built a garage with workshop and pit on the site of the horse yards near the old stable.

By the mid 1930s, Lanyon again carried 10,000 sheep, cattle provided both milk and meat, and the gardens and orchards provided for all the residents and workers. Horses were again bred on the property too, and a large shearing shed and shearers’ quarters were built. In the post-war years Bert Edwards directed intensive land clearing using a cable attached to a Fowler steamroller to uproot the huge yellow box trees. This effectively doubled the acreage for fodder crops; with wheat, oats, rye and clovers rotated, and four tractors working at night as well as during the day when ploughing and sowing were underway. After a 1951 conference in Canberra outlined the new “sub-and-super” technique for soil improvement, Edwards immediately adopted it for the 10% of Lanyon under cultivation. The newly cleared areas were ploughed and spread with the combination of superphosphate fertiliser and nitrogen-fixing clover, with the hilly areas covered by air. Where thistles grew they were cut out by hand, though from the late 1950s herbicides like 2,4,5-T were used, at the same time that the myxomatosis virus was introduced, eradicating rabbits. It became one of the largest freehold estates in the ACT, with a nine mile river frontage and nearly 10,000 acres of improved pastures sown, capable of breeding and fattening large numbers of sheep and cattle.

The third manager of the Field era, J M Eggleston, took over in 1952 and Belford in 1956. They oversaw the introduction of cross-breeding for fat lambs and a Hereford herd for beef production. With the price of wool peaking and a Merino flock of 16,000. Lanyon was not only a showpiece but a very prosperous success story and hopefully you’ll be shortly able to access film footage from this era on our website.

Under the last manager, Murdoch Geikie, who arrived in May 1959, the river flats were irrigated to increase lucerne production and additional dams constructed.

In 1972 Lanyon was placed on the National Trust’s heritage register. In 1974 Sidney Nolan decided to donate 24 paintings to the people of Australia and he selected Lanyon as the location to exhibit his gift. In April 1974, the Whitlam Government settled the legal case regarding the resumption of Lanyon. When the Field family vacated Lanyon later than year, Murdoch Geikie leased much of the land and many buildings, pending its transformation into suburbs. He continued to farm the land and was succeeded by Andrew who continues to farm Lanyon and will shortly share his family’s story.

In 1978 Lanyon Homestead was listed on the Register of the National Estate and it was acquired by the Commonwealth as an historic place. Considerable research and conservation work took place and it has been operating as a museum since. It is now part of ACT Historic Places, ACT Museums and Galleries, under the ACT Government. Lanyon is rare among house museums in retaining its original surrounds and land use. Urban development may have eroded the land holding, but as you might have noticed, once over the first grid, the city and suburbs seem a world away.

This historical account of Lanyon’s farming practices highlights technological advances and its affect on labour. This is especially demonstrated in a comparison of the Wright era to the Field era. The Field’s high use of mechanisation and chemicals was so very different to Wright’s reliance on convict labour and limited horsepower. And the buildings were adapted to these changes too. The slab hut, for example, once used by a gardener or other farm workers became a storage area for 2,4,5-T during the Field era. And, as we will see with Andrew’s contribution, practices have continually been superseded.

Resources:

* Lanyon Conservation Management Plan, Vols 1 & 2

<http://www.museumsandgalleries.act.gov.au/lanyon/documents/LanyonCMPV1V2.pdf>

* Lawson, Elaine, 1994, *Lanyon*, AGPS, Canberra.
* Withycombe, Susan Mary W, 1988, *Lanyon: Within Living Memory,* AGPS, Canberra.
* Chambers, Don, 1986 [2010], *Lanyon as a pastoral property 1835-1970*, ACT Heritage Library.
* Kerr, Rosemary, 1999, *Lanyon, the Early Years: A History of Lanyon during the era of John Lanyon and James Wright*, Sue Rosen & Associates, Historians and Heritage Consultants, Epping, NSW.
* Oral history recording with Jim Brooks, former employee at Lanyon: <http://www.museumsandgalleries.act.gov.au/artefactchat/oralhistory.html>
* Film of Field Era will hopefully be on the Lanyon website sometime in the near future.