

PART ONE

Chapter One

Introduction

The Greatest Tragedy.

Walter Stewart Park spent just two months on the Western Front with the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) during World War I, long enough to ruin his health and change his life. In April 1918, Park was wounded in action, suffering severe shell concussion and gas poisoning.¹ After he was discharged, still a young man and with a wife and five children to support, Park decided a farming life would help improve his health. To realise this hope Walter Park trained to become a poultry farmer at Hawkesbury Agricultural College.² Walter was offered Block 361, a poultry farm of just over six acres at Chipping Norton Soldier Settlement, when it was established early in 1920. Chipping Norton was a group soldier settlement in the outer western suburbs of Sydney containing small poultry blocks, viticulture and fruit and vegetable blocks. Walter hoped having his brother John, also an ex-serviceman, living only a couple of blocks away on another poultry farm would benefit them both. Soon after moving to Chipping Norton, Walter requested permission to build a verandah onto his house saying doctors recommended he sleep outside, 'on account of lung trouble caused by gas at the front'.³ For Walter Park success as a soldier settler proved elusive and he was forced to forfeit his farm in late 1923 because of his health. A year later he was in hospital being treated for what Lands Department officials were told was advanced

¹ National Archives of Australia: Australian Imperial Force, Base Records Office; B2455, *1st Australian Imperial Force Personnel Dossiers 1914-1920*, SERN 18644 PARK, Walter Stewart.

² University of Western Sydney Archives *AS-401 Student card system* [Hawkesbury Agricultural College; Hawkesbury Agricultural College of Advanced Education] 16/03/1891-31/12/1972, Park trained from 3 June 1919.

³ State Records of New South Wales: *Department of Lands, Returned Soldier Settlement Loan Files*, NRS 8058 [12/7368], Loan File 8058, PARK, W. The request is dated 2 September 1920.

tuberculosis. Unable to work, Park's only income was his war disability pension, inadequate to support him.⁴ Walter Park's story is incomplete, as no other information has been found to show how he supported himself and his family after forfeiting his small farm. Although Walter's older brother, John Alexander Park, ended his war with medals and citations for bravery, severe health problems also forced him to forfeit his poultry farm.⁵

Neither Walter nor John Park's story is unique. They are only two of many from loan files of the Returned Soldiers' Settlement Branch (RSSB) concerning returned servicemen who took up blocks on the six group soldier settlements in the County of Cumberland in the aftermath of World War I. The files record the attempts of men who became soldier settlers on small blocks of land near Sydney, men whose lives were devastated by their wartime experiences and injuries. Nearly 420,000 men enlisted and 330,000 embarked for overseas service with the AIF during World War I.⁶ Two-thirds of those who sailed were wounded, gassed or killed.⁷ The return of soldiers from the war produced a new phenomenon. Prior to 1914, unskilled men could generally find employment if they were fit and healthy. Their physical toil working as labourers, carters, station hands or horse drivers enabled them to make a living. It will be argued in this thesis that the war changed all of that. Men returned to Australia suffering in body and mind, with injuries that would last their lifetime, and they often had to struggle to have their conditions recognised as war-related by

⁴ *ibid.*, Noting Park's condition February 1925; no other income than pension noted June 1925.

⁵ NAA: B2455, *op. cit.*, SERN 4137 PARK, John Alexander; NAA: Department of Veterans' Affairs, Branch Office, New South Wales; C138, *Personal case files, single number series (Australian 1914-1918 War)* R52965, PARK, J.A.

⁶ L.J. Pryor, 'The Origins of Australia's Repatriation Policy 1914-1920', M.A. Thesis, University of Melbourne, 1932, p. 144.

⁷ A.D. Gilbert, J. Robertson, R. Russell, 'Computing Military History: A Research Report on the First AIF Project', *War & Society*, Vol. 7, No. 1, 1989, p. 106.

repatriation authorities. The aftermath for these men, without their physical strength, was catastrophic.

Approximately 38,000 men and women across Australia became soldier settlers after World War I.⁸ Their story, their hardships and memories and those of their descendants, has remained under-researched. The scheme promised much to returned men, although few would now dispute that soldier settlement produced a ‘bitter harvest’.⁹ Some historians go even further, claiming soldier settlement policies intended to encourage a new class of small farmers were not just foolishly short-sighted, but also foreshadowed failure.¹⁰

This thesis examines the six group soldier settlements in the County of Cumberland in the greater Sydney metropolitan area in New South Wales after World War I and the hundreds of men who attempted to make a living from them. Small acreage farms in group settlements for returned men was a tenure unique to New South Wales. This thesis argues that group soldier settlement was promoted by the state Labor government, providing a solution to settling large numbers of men in a land scheme for which the state had little available Crown land. The New South Wales Labor Party, committed to land reform and innovative socialist policies to improve the life of the working man, believed group soldier settlements would prove successful.¹¹

⁸ The exact number of men and women who became soldier settlers is difficult to define. It is likely many ex-service personnel who stayed for short periods were not included in official numbers. Justice Pike states Australia-wide the total was 37,561. Justice Pike, *Report on Losses Due to Soldier Settlement*, H.J. Green, Government Printer, Canberra, August 1929, p. 59.

⁹ R. Linn, *Battling the Land. 200 Years of Rural Australia*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1999, p. 114.

¹⁰ R. Bromby, *Unlocking the Land. The saga of farming in Australia*, Lothian Publishing Company Pty Ltd, Melbourne, 1986, p. 103.

¹¹ G. Greenwood, ‘National Development and Social Experimentation, 1901-14’ in G. Greenwood (ed), *Australia. A Social and Political History*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1955, p. 251; I. Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics. The Dynamics of the Labour Movement in Eastern Australia 1900-1921*, Australian National University Press, Canberra, 1965, p. 46.

Additionally, these settlements, primarily for poultry farms, would stimulate a small industry with potential for growth.¹²

The government argued group soldier settlement on small blocks of land were suitable for inexperienced men or men whose war-related disabilities precluded their return to pre-war occupations.¹³ New South Wales had agreed to settle a quota of 8,405 men on the land under the Soldier Settlement Scheme.¹⁴ By November 1920, approximately half the 5,633 soldiers settled in this state were under the tenure of group settlements. The settlements were spread across the state including Montavella at Bathurst, Kentucky near Armidale, Clinton at Inverell and Glen Innes.¹⁵ The average cost of a farm on the earliest group settlements was less than £300, making group settlement a practical and cost-effective type of tenure, although from the earliest times, they ‘did not appear to live up to expectations’.¹⁶

It will be argued in this thesis that large numbers of men on these group settlements decided to become soldier settlers on small farms because it was the only work they believed they could do after their return to Australia. Largely unskilled, and with impaired health, they had few available options to support themselves and their

¹² The poultry industry barely existed before the beginning of the twentieth century. See Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics, *The Official Year Book of the Commonwealth of Australia 1901-1907, No. 1*, G.H. Knibbs, Commonwealth Statistician, Melbourne, March 1908, p. 369. Poultry farming had previously been listed with dairying. Egg laying competitions begun at Hawkesbury Agricultural College in 1901 were designed to stimulate the industry. See H.A. Smith, Government Statistician, *The Official Year Book of New South Wales 1918*, W.A. Gullick, Government Printer, Sydney, 1920, p. 478, p. 699.

¹³ W.G. Ashford, *Land for Soldiers*, Government Printer, Sydney, 1918.

¹⁴ NAA: Repatriation Department; A2487, *Correspondence files, annual single number series, 1918-1929*; 1922/2779, Conferences regarding soldier land settlement.

¹⁵ The total number of settlers in group settlements were 2,596 from a total of 5,633. See NAA: A2487, *op. cit.*, 1924/5641. Soldier Land Settlement Statistics. From the New South Wales Department of Repatriation, 11 January 1921.

¹⁶ Pryor, *op. cit.*, p. 220, p. 227. Settlements at Montavella (Bathurst), Clinton (Inverell), Glen Innes and Bankstown.

families.¹⁷ This thesis will show that most failed because of their health. With little previous historical research into the civilian life post-war of members of the AIF, this thesis will reveal that for a significant proportion of soldier settlers in these group settlements, the peace was blighted by their war experiences.

Group soldier settlement in New South Wales consisted of small farms clustered around a central administration area, with a resident manager whose role was to assist inexperienced men and perform administrative tasks. The group soldier settlements in the County of Cumberland were a refuge for hundreds of men broken by the war. Twelve years after the establishment of the first soldier settlement in this study, nearly 200 returned men had already tried and left.¹⁸ This thesis will argue they were unsuitable as soldier settlers, but largely through no fault of their own. Men initially encouraged to become farmers on small blocks found they could not support themselves. Their debts mounted. Hounded by government authorities to make repayments, with little or no consideration of personal circumstances, many returned men walked away. Soldier settlement, even if short-lived, was often the only permanent employment they had after the war. The group soldier settlements in the County of Cumberland became, by default, a type of unemployment scheme for damaged men who could do no other work.

¹⁷ The vast majority of men on the settlements in this study were unskilled and without any other financial resources. There was no government scheme providing unemployment benefits, so returned men who were not completely disabled had to work. Their war pension, if they had one, did not provide enough to support themselves and their families. See, for example, M.A. Jones, *The Australian Welfare State. Origins, Control and Choices*. 3rd Edn, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1990, p. 21; R. Mendelsohn, *The Position of the People. Social Welfare in Australia 1900- 1975*, George Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1979, pp. 22-45; B. Dickey, *No Charity There. A short history of social welfare in Australia*, 2nd Edn, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1987.

¹⁸ See Appendix A.

Former Labor Prime Minister, John Christian Watson, Honorary Organiser of the Federal Parliamentary War Committee, produced a report to the Commonwealth government in September 1915 about employment and settling returned men on the land after the war.¹⁹ The nine recommendations made in the subsequent three-page report, 'Employment of Returned Soldiers. Recommendations of Federal Parliamentary War Committee', included co-operation between Commonwealth and state governments to promote a soldier settlement scheme across the country. This report stated provision of land should remain within the states' jurisdiction and administration, whilst the Commonwealth would be expected to provide funding through loans to each of the states to finance the project.²⁰

The decision to accept Watson's proposal for a nation-wide soldier settlement scheme was accepted in early 1916 at a conference of Commonwealth and state representatives in Melbourne.²¹ The New South Wales Minister for Lands, William Ashford, introduced a Returned Soldiers' Settlement Bill into state parliament the following month.²² The 1916 act defined the term 'discharged soldier', and broadly outlined regulations and financial assistance to be offered by the state.²³ The terms

¹⁹ NAA: A 2487, *op.cit.*, 17/1050 Federal Parliamentary War Committee printed papers, 'Returned Soldiers. Employment and Settlement. Suggested plan of action by the governments and people of the states to insure adequate provision for returned soldiers in relation to (a) employment and (b) settlement on the land', 17 September 1915.

²⁰ *ibid.*, 'Report and Recommendations of the Sub-Committee Appointed by the Federal Parliamentary War Committee to consider the question of Settling Returned Soldiers Upon the Land', agreed to by the Federal Parliamentary War Committee, 19 January 1916.

²¹ C. Lloyd, J. Rees, *The Last Shilling. A History of Repatriation in Australia*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1994, p. 47 quoting *Report of the Resolutions, Proceedings and Debates of the Conference of Representatives of the Commonwealth and State governments and of the Federal Parliamentary War Committee in respect of the Settlement of Returned Soldiers on the Land, etc., Melbourne 17-19 February, 1916*.

²² New South Wales Parliamentary Debates, Vol. 62, p. 5328. The Act, cited as the Returned Soldiers' Settlement Act, 1916 was assented to on 19 April 1916.

²³ *A Bill to make provision for the settlement of returned soldiers on Crown lands or lands acquired under the Closer Settlement Acts; to amend the Crown Lands Consolidation Act, 1913, the Closer Settlement Acts, the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Act, 1910, and the Irrigation Act, 1912; and for purposes*

and conditions for soldiers' group purchases, the subject of this study, were included in the amended act of November 1917.²⁴

The Commonwealth was primarily responsible for providing for members of the AIF in the post-war period. To meet this need, the Australian Soldiers' Repatriation Bill was introduced into Federal Parliament in July 1917.²⁵ The resulting Department of Repatriation commenced operating in April 1918. Its duty was more than simply returning members of the AIF to Australia after the war. Its responsibilities included providing returned men with sustenance payments during hospitalisation, training, and non-productive periods of soldier settlement. Other assistance included providing war-service homes in suburban areas, grants to pay for education or to purchase small businesses, equipment or tools of trade. The Department of Repatriation was also responsible for veterans' medical treatment for war-related conditions, including providing artificial limbs and funeral expenses.²⁶ Although the objective of the Commonwealth Repatriation Department was 'to enable the individual who was drawing his military pay one day to become a wage-earner the next', assisting men return to civilian life often proved difficult.²⁷ Whilst the Repatriation Department had no direct involvement in the soldier settlement scheme, its function of responsibility for returned men meant significant numbers of soldier settlers had dealings with this department throughout the time they were on the land.

consequent thereon or incidental thereto, Government Printer, Sydney, 1916. The Act number was left blank when printed.

²⁴ New South Wales Act No. 21, 1916 as amended by the Act No. 24, 1917, Government Printer, Sydney, 1917, pp. 7-8.

²⁵ Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates, Vol. 82, p. 183.

²⁶ E. Scott, *Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-18. Vol. XI. Australia During the War*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1936, p. 836.

²⁷ *Repatriation*, Vol. 1, No. 1, March 1919, p. 3.

In an open letter distributed to troops returning home after the war, Senator Edward Millen, the first Commonwealth Minister for Repatriation, assured soldiers that 'Australia is determined that every returned soldier shall have a full opportunity to again establish himself in civil life'.²⁸ But for many survivors, their war-related disabilities increased with time, making readjustment to civilian life more difficult as years went by. In addition, war experiences left returned men isolated, the differences between soldier and civilian often too large to overcome.²⁹ Studying the psychological effects of returned men after World War I, Lindstrom believed these disorders had an impact on the wider community as well as veterans for many decades.³⁰ He argued that the number of men traumatised by war experiences was significantly higher than the 5,000 men officially discharged with psychological problems. Many sufferers were either never diagnosed or overseas records of treatment had been destroyed. After the war, the Department of Repatriation noted that the number of men seeking treatment for war-related conditions rose.³¹ Neurasthenia, a medical term found in several soldier settlers' service files in this study, meant the 'psychologically-derived mental and nervous exhaustion' of soldiers.³² Another psychological disorder found in soldier settlers' records is 'dilated action of the heart', a condition also referred to as 'effort syndrome' or 'soldier's heart'.³³ Post-war both these neuroses made men emotional cripples, affecting every part of their life and their families' lives.

Lindstrom's research provides evidence of several Victorian soldier settlers who

²⁸ 'Australia', *The Round Table. The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 10, No. 37, December 1919, p. 172.

²⁹ A. Ellis, 'The Impact of War and Peace on Australian Soldiers 1914-1920', B.A. (Hons) Thesis, Murdoch University, 1979, p. 71.

³⁰ R. Lindstrom, 'The Australian Experience of Psychological Casualties in War 1915-1939', PhD Thesis, Victoria University of Technology, 1997.

³¹ A.G. Butler, *Official History of the Australian Army Medical Services 1914-1918. Vol. III. Special Problems and Services*, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1st edition, 1943, p. 928 quoted in Lindstrom, pp. 3-4.

³² Lindstrom, *op. cit.*, p. 114 quoting J.W. Springthorpe, 'War Neuroses and Civil Practice', *The Medical Journal of Australia*, 4 October 1919, p. 281.

³³ *ibid.*, p. 114.

failed as farmers because of their psychological disabilities.³⁴ These findings concur with information in a significant number of loan files of soldier settlers in this thesis, evidence not recognised at the time of their forfeiture in the 1920s and 1930s.

The six group purchase soldier settlements established in the County of Cumberland were at Bankstown, Chipping Norton, Grantham at Seven Hills, Campbelltown, Hillview near Liverpool and Doonside. This thesis investigates why ex-servicemen decided to become soldier settlers on small farms, primarily for poultry, and the reasons for their failure or success. With no capital, no skills and no prospect of returning to their pre-war occupations it will be argued that for a considerable number of soldier settlers on these six group settlements, it represented their only hope of making a living after their return from the war.

A significant number of more than 360 identified men on the 189 farms in these settlements were discharged medically unfit. Many required on-going medical treatment for a range of disabilities. Their pensions, if they had one, were never enough to live on, forcing damaged men to find a decent living for themselves and their families. They had volunteered to serve their nation for a range of reasons, leaving Australia fit and healthy. Mostly unskilled, they had nevertheless been able to support themselves in the pre-war days as long as they had good health. But the war changed that. Those who survived came home with a variety of physical injuries and illnesses, most war-related, while others suffered war neuroses and psychological injuries that affected all aspects of their civilian life. Large numbers of these returned

³⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 231-232, pp. 237-239.

soldiers became soldier settlers on the group settlements in the County of Cumberland.

The shadows of World War I lingered for the men on these group soldier settlements. The war shaped their lives in ways no-one had envisaged. It robbed them of physical health and damaged them mentally, with many of their war-related conditions never accepted by repatriation authorities or recognised by the community at large. The difficulties returned men experienced in their attempts simply to survive the peace have been extensively examined by historians such as Bill Gammage and Marina Larsson.³⁵ The impact of these men's struggles on the generations of Australians that followed similarly demands attention.

Literature Review

Many notable Australian historians including Stephen Garton, Alistair Thomson, Bill Gammage and most recently Marina Larsson, have written extensively about the physical, psychological and social impact of World War I on Australian servicemen.³⁶ Gammage's powerful statement that 'there never was a greater tragedy than the First World War', reveals the enormous human cost both during and after the Great War.³⁷ A better understanding of war's impact on Australian society is being enunciated

³⁵B. Gammage, *The Broken Years. Australian Soldiers in the Great War*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 2010; M. Larsson, *Shattered Anzacs. Living with the scars of war*, University of New South Wales Press, Sydney, 2009.

³⁶See, for example, S. Garton, *The Cost of War. Australians Return*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1996; A. Thomson, *Anzac Memories. Living with the Legend*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1994; B. Gammage, *op. cit.*; M. Larsson, *op. cit.*; J. Damousi, M. Lake (eds), *Gender and War. Australians at war in the twentieth century*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1995.

³⁷ B. Gammage, *op. cit.*, p. xvii.

through recent investigations of the aftermath of the war.³⁸ For those who returned, their lives and those of their families were never the same again. A sense of ‘unrelenting peril’ scarred survivors.³⁹ Many returned men suffered physical and mental breakdowns after their service, severe enough to make their efforts to survive the peace difficult, even impossible.⁴⁰ The ex-serviceman was dogged by grief, physical and psychological impairments until his death. Resentment of a different way of life and changes in the homefront contributed to greater insecurities for returned men endeavouring to adapt to civilian life.⁴¹

Thomson, in retelling veterans’ experiences and memories of World War I, noted the appalling conditions men experienced on the frontline.⁴² Examining how returned men readjusted to civilian life, he believed ‘how a man fared in this post-war battle depended on how badly he had been affected by the war’.⁴³ Not fit enough mentally or physically to become soldier settlers, Thomson’s conclusion is particularly apt given the results of this thesis. For many returned men skills learnt in war did not equip them for peace and efforts to ‘settle down’ were too difficult. Major Alcock, a soldier settler near Gosford in New South Wales, for example, said more than ten years after the war that ‘peace could crush with care, or dull with monotony... The

³⁸ M. Crotty, M. Larsson (eds), *Anzac Legacies. Australians and the Aftermath of War*, Australian Scholarly Publishing, Melbourne, 2010.

³⁹ S.R. Ward (ed), *The War Generation. Veterans of the First World War*, National University Publications, Kennikat Press, New York, 1975, p. 4.

⁴⁰ K. Blackmore, *The Dark Pocket of Time. War, Medicine and the Australian State, 1914-1935*, Lythrum Press, Adelaide, 2008, p. 10.

⁴¹ P. Leese, ‘Problems Returning Home: The British Psychological Casualties of the Great War’, *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 40, No. 4, December 1997, p. 1060; Winter notes ex-servicemen ‘stared across that gap [after 1918] with anger, cynicism, and a conviction that the post war world in which they lived was forever severed from the world they had left’, J.M. Winter, ‘Review: Catastrophe and Culture: Recent Trends in the Historiography of the First World War’, *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 64, No. 3, 1992, p. 529.

⁴² Thomson, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

⁴³ *ibid.*, p. 105.

greatest prize was escape from failure'.⁴⁴ After years of 'living on the edge' during the war, returned men struggled to cope with the sameness of civilian life, further handicapped by the loss of their health. Less than a year after the end of hostilities, Australian authorities were forced to acknowledge that 'no man who passed through the battle zone returned to the Commonwealth in a normal condition'.⁴⁵

The hidden history of disabled men after World War I, examined by Marina Larsson in her acclaimed study, *Shattered Anzacs*, was published in 2009. For many men and their families and carers, the war continued long after 1918. The evidence she provides of wounded and burnt-out soldiers and men who developed the 'non-battle' disease of tuberculosis resonates with the stories of several soldier settlers in this thesis. Larsson commented that Australia's 60,000 dead from World War I are commemorated in memorials and ceremonies, whilst the 90,000 shattered ex-servicemen and their families remain an invisible component in post-war Australia.⁴⁶ Australian casualty statistics from World War I vary from less than 100,000 to more than double that number.⁴⁷ Although not every soldier settler on the group settlements in the County of Cumberland was disabled, a large number had war disabilities which affected their lives and their families. Many were unable to produce proof their disabilities were sustained during their war service, which made them ineligible for a

⁴⁴ SRNSW: NRS 8058, *op. cit.*, [10/37120] Loan File 865, G.I. ADCOCK and C.H. BLUMER. Fagan's Farm, Patonga, near Gosford; Gammage, *op. cit.*, p. 280.

⁴⁵ Repatriation Department Interim Report to 30 June 1919, *Commonwealth Parliamentary Papers, 1917-1919*, Vol. IV, Melbourne, 1919, p. 5 quoted in D. Blair, *Dinkum Diggers, An Australian Battalion at War*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 2001, p. 106.

⁴⁶ Larsson, *op. cit.*, p. 265.

⁴⁷ See, for example, J.N.I. Dawes and L.L. Robson, *Citizen to Soldier*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1977, p. viii. This account states 216,000 casualties; J. Beaumont, 'Australia's War' in J. Beaumont (ed), *Australia's War, 1914-18*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1995, p. 1. This account states 156,228 were wounded or taken prisoner of war.

pension. By the mid-1920s, it is estimated another 20,000 returned Australian servicemen had died from war wounds, significantly increasing the war statistics.⁴⁸

A recent publication, *Anzac Legacies*, has examined Australian servicemen and women's return from war from World War I to the current conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. Placing an emphasis on the aftermath rather than the military strategy and outcomes of battle, it offers an understanding of how the Australian nation has dealt with and continues to deal with veterans.⁴⁹ Articles by Melanie Oppenheimer and Marina Larsson describing the care of broken soldiers by the Australian Red Cross and family members as primary caregivers, underlines the caring voluntary roles Australians undertook for many years after World War I.⁵⁰ The important role of the Australian Red Cross in assisting returned personnel, especially the men in this study who received treatment in specialised 'nerve homes', is addressed later in this thesis.

Kate Blackmore's *The Dark Pocket of Time*, is an invaluable resource into the social welfare aspects of war-pensioning and the medical profession's role in diagnosis and treatment during and after World War I. Of particular relevance to this study are the sections on trench fever, war neuroses, and the short and long-term effects of gassing.⁵¹ Several settlers in this study claimed ill health years after the war as a result of gassing, information not recorded in their service files. Similarly, Michael Tyquin's *Madness and the Military* provides insights into the treatment of shell shock, and begs

⁴⁸ M. Larsson, 'A Disenfranchised Grief: Post-war Death and Memorialisation in Australia after the First World War', *Australian Historical Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 1, 2009, p. 79.

⁴⁹ M. Crotty, M. Larsson (eds), *op. cit.*

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, M. Oppenheimer, ' "Fated to a Life of Suffering." Graythwaite, the Australian Red Cross and returned soldiers, 1916-39', pp. 18-38; M. Larsson, ' "The Part We Do Not See" Disabled Australian soldiers and family caregiving after World War I', pp. 39-60.

⁵¹ K. Blackmore, *op. cit.*

the question whether civilian life after the war for returned men suffering psychological problems was ‘a cold, disappointing thing’.⁵² Tyquin identifies that research into the medical military history between the wars and its effect on Australian society has been largely ignored by historians.⁵³ In part, this thesis will address this gap, arguing that ex-servicemen’s disabilities as a result of war service impacted much more on their civilian lives than has previously been identified.

The historiography of Australian soldier settlement schemes after World War I has been patchy to date, and further research is required about each state’s implementation and results before a more complete picture can be compiled. Similarly, administration and types of land tenures differed between states, with surviving files recording a range of diverse information. One of the seminal works on Australian soldier settlement is Marilyn Lake’s *The Limits of Hope. Soldier Settlement in Victoria 1915-38*.⁵⁴ The book, a revised version of Lake’s 1984 PhD thesis, examined 300 files of soldier settlers across Victoria. Lake’s research was the first major academic study of World War I soldier settlement undertaken in Australia. Lake argued that the soldier settlement scheme was the last attempt by governments to introduce a closer settlement land policy and develop a yeoman class of smallholders.⁵⁵ The English yeoman class, hardworking and thrifty, was similarly

⁵² M. Tyquin, *Madness and the Military: Australia’s experience of the Great War*, Australian Military History Publications, Sydney, 2006. The title of Chapter Seven is ‘Civilian Life: A Cold, Disappointing Thing?’ pp. 114-134. The title is a quote from a newspaper editorial in the *Singleton Argus*, 12 February 1920.

⁵³ *ibid.*, p. xi.

⁵⁴ M. Lake, *The Limits of Hope. Soldier Settlement in Victoria 1915- 38*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1987.

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, p. 238; M. Keneley, ‘Land of Hope: Soldier Settlement in the Western District of Victoria 1918-1930’, *The Electronic Journal of Australian and New Zealand History*, April 2000, www.jcu.edu.au, accessed 14 July 2008.

expected to suit Australian conditions.⁵⁶ Considered the backbone of an agricultural economy, production from yeoman smallholdings was, it was argued, essential for commercial growth.⁵⁷ Australian ‘back-to-the-land’ and closer settlement policies and their links with soldier settlement will be examined in more depth later in this thesis.

Another study of soldier settlement in Victoria concluded the main reasons for failure were environmental factors including poor quality land, expensive development costs and declining prices for primary produce in the 1920s and 1930s.⁵⁸ Frost’s research identified that poor health was a factor that impacted on soldier settlers’ success, but this facet of failure was not fully investigated.⁵⁹ Several years after the war, authorities in Victoria maintained their belief in the rejuvenating qualities of rural living, confidently stating that ‘life in the open air had been the means of re-establishing many a soldier’s health and strength’.⁶⁰

Murray Johnson’s study of soldier settlement in Queensland is the largest research to date of the scheme in that state.⁶¹ Arguing Queensland’s soldier settlement scheme developed from the state Labor government’s new agricultural and social policies, soldier settlement aimed to populate northern Australia, in response to invasion fears from Asian countries. An extension of the White Australia Policy, Johnson argued this xenophobia saw soldier settlers become government pawns, farming unsuitable

⁵⁶ L.G. MacGillivray, ‘Land and People: European Land Settlement in the South-East of South Australia 1840- 1940’, PhD Thesis, University of Adelaide, 1983; M.A. Fletcher, ‘The Small Farm Ideal: Closer Settlement in the Maffra Sale Area 1911- 1938’, M.A. Thesis, Monash University, 1987.

⁵⁷ J.M. Powell, *Mirrors of the New World*, Australian National University Press, Canberra, 1978, p. 82.

⁵⁸ K. Frost, ‘Soldier Settlement after World War I in South-Western Victoria’, PhD Thesis, Deakin University, 2002, p. iv, p. 5, p. 12.

⁵⁹ *ibid.*, pp. 2-3.

⁶⁰ *Victorian Parliamentary Debates*, 1927, p. 7. Report of the Closer Settlement Board 1927 – Part 1. Discharged Soldier Settlement, quoted in Frost, p. 108.

⁶¹ M. Johnson, ‘Honour Denied: A Study of Soldier Settlement in Queensland, 1916-1929’, PhD Thesis, University of Queensland, 2002.

and isolated land.⁶² Johnson believed the Queensland failure rate for soldier settlement was significantly higher than the findings tabled in the 1929 Pike Report, and extrapolates rates across other Australian states would also have been higher.⁶³ Summarising Queensland soldier settlers' experiences, Johnson stated, 'the struggle against mud, sand and shells was merely transformed into a battle against the natural environment, abject poverty and governmental neglect'.⁶⁴ Viewed in these terms, soldier settlement in Queensland was a war on different soil.

Tasmanian soldier settlement studies reveal sixty per cent of soldier settlers in that state forfeited their holdings, findings that concur with Johnson's Queensland study.⁶⁵ Hastily introduced legislation that did not specify returned men applying for soldier settlement must be experienced, resulted in administrative problems and problems with the selection of settlers. In Tasmania, training was not initially available for inexperienced men, disadvantaging these men.⁶⁶ Due to these shortcomings, many returned men suffering poor health and unfit for hard physical labour received land with little support mechanisms. Although the 1921 Select Committee Report noted that 'the physical and mental capacity of the men had been marked by the war', there is no further reference to how these conditions affected their ability to farm.⁶⁷ Within

⁶² *ibid.*, pp. 415-416.

⁶³ *ibid.*, pp. 420-421, quoting 'Report by the Land Administration Board under 'The Discharged Soldiers' Settlement Acts, 1917 to 1926', *Queensland Parliamentary Papers*, Vol. 2, 1929, p. 577. Johnson states failure rates in Queensland were in excess of sixty percent.

⁶⁴ M. Johnson, ' "Promises and Pineapples" : Post-First World War Soldier Settlement at Beerburrum, Queensland, 1916-1929', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, Vol. 51, No. 4, 2005, p. 498.

⁶⁵ Q. Beresford, 'The World War One Soldier Settlement Scheme in Tasmania', *Tasmanian Historical Research Association Papers and Proceedings*, Vol. 30, No. 3, September 1983, p. 90; C. Martin, 'The Great War's Aftermath in the Huon', *Tasmanian Historical Research Association Papers and Proceedings*, Vol. 42, No. 1, March 1995, p. 44.

⁶⁶ A. Richardson, 'The Long Road Home: Repatriation in Tasmania, 1916-1929', PhD Thesis, University of Tasmania, 2005, pp. 299-300. Legislation was amended in Tasmania in 1919 to provide training for potential soldier settlers, but by this date, Richardson argues, large numbers of men were already on the land.

⁶⁷ *ibid.*, p. 326. Richardson's study does not consider the reasons why men forfeited or left their soldier settlement farms, even though he provides an example of Cyril Edward Inches, a returned man, who

three years the Tasmanian Closer Settlement Board estimated only half the soldier settlers were making any progress.⁶⁸ Not surprisingly, given the Closer Settlement Board's earlier findings, the 1926 Royal Commission into soldier settlement in Tasmania revealed less than half the original settlers remained.⁶⁹

A recent study of nurses who applied for land under soldier settlement in New South Wales and Victoria concluded that these women were 'not openly encouraged', as the repatriation scheme was geared towards men who had fought, excluding those who served in non-combat positions.⁷⁰ Williams argues many nurses were discharged unfit, their mental and physical health as a result of war service later impacting on their civilian life, and that these women have remained largely 'invisible' in archival records of soldier settlement.⁷¹

A comparative study of soldier settlement schemes after both World Wars, concluded soldier settlement after World War I had not only enormous personal and institutional financial losses, but was also a social tragedy.⁷² Unfit for heavy labour and suffering the long-term effects of gassing or wounds, it argued men with war-related disabilities should never have become soldier settlers. Sparkes concluded that for many soldier settlers financial hardship was only part of the human cost of failure.⁷³ As noted in the Queensland study, many soldier settlers bore the emotional scars of their failure for

became a District Inspector for the Board in 1924, after being unable to continue working his own orchard because of war injuries, p. 348.

⁶⁸ Beresford, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

⁶⁹ *ibid.*, *The Argus*, 30 September 1926, p. 9; Beresford states this report was never published, p. 90.

⁷⁰ S. Williams, '“Not Openly Encouraged” – Nurse Soldier Settlers after World War One', M.A. (Hons) Thesis, University of New England, 2010.

⁷¹ *ibid.*, p. 2, pp. 12-13.

⁷² R. Sparkes, '“Forty Acres and A Crow.” A Comparison of Soldier Settlement in Australia After the Two World Wars', M.A. (Hons) Thesis, University of New England, 1996.

⁷³ *ibid.*, p. 10.

years.⁷⁴ An Australian Research Linkage Project, partnered by New South Wales State Records and the Department of Veterans' Affairs, through Monash University and the University of New England, is currently undertaking research into soldier settlement in New South Wales. An initiative of the project is a website providing case studies and information to provide easier access to archival material for researchers and the wider community.⁷⁵

The idea of a land settlement scheme for returned men after World War I was not unique to Australia. Schemes in Britain, Canada, New Zealand, South Africa and the United States of America were introduced with high hopes that were not realised. The war revealed a need for increased production of primary products for domestic and export markets, production that would strengthen economies and contribute to the repayment of war debts. It also highlighted concerns about vast tracts of uninhabited lands, especially in Australia and Canada, considered defenceless against the threat of invasion.

It is argued governments believed post-war that social reform to improve the lives of working men, especially returned servicemen, was necessary to help re-build the nation and its economy, and incorporated many features of nineteenth century co-operative village settlements into later soldier settlement policy. Similar to the Australian experience, many nations maintained the yeoman myth that increased production through smallholdings would build economic wealth, maintaining a

⁷⁴ R. Sparkes, 'Soldier Settlement Following World War I : A Costly Experiment', *Armidale and District Historical Society Journal and Proceedings*, Issue 40, April 1997, p. 15; Johnson, 'Promises and Pineapples', *op. cit.*, p. 498.

⁷⁵ <http://soldiersettlementrecords.nsw.gov.au> ; 'A Land fit for Heroes?', accessed 5 January 2011. Professor Bruce Scates and Associate Professor Melanie Oppenheimer are the principal academic researchers for this project.

conservative democratic class with strong ties to the land. They believed policies for settling returned men on the land would benefit everyone.

The British report, *Settlement or Employment on the Land in England and Wales of Discharged Sailors and Soldiers*, released in January 1916, expected large numbers of ex-servicemen would choose a rural life after the war. In recommending a soldier settlement scheme, the report suggested smallholdings as the best tenure, arguing that it would increase agricultural production and allow all men, regardless of disabilities, to have useful occupations as civilians.⁷⁶ Advocating fruit and vegetable growing as best for inexperienced or disabled men, as training could be short and simple, the report particularly discouraged poultry farming because of its unstable history.⁷⁷

Britain also encouraged returned soldiers to apply for soldier settlement lands in far-flung corners of the Empire such as British East Africa, later called Kenya. This was a government sponsored effort to bring 'white' settlers to the area, specifically pitched to the officer class.⁷⁸ A similar plan for white ex-servicemen to farm on group soldier settlements in South Africa may have been in response to concerns about security and isolation. In 1919 at Ntambanana in Zululand, approximately 100 miles from Durban,

⁷⁶ *Final Report of the Departmental Committee appointed by the President of the Board of Agriculture and Fisheries to consider the Settlement or Employment on the Land in England and Wales of Discharged Sailors and Soldiers*, Parliamentary Publication [Cd.8182] Eyre and Spittiswoode, London, 1916; C. Miller and M. Roche, 'New Zealand's "New Order": Town Planning and Soldier Settlement After the First World War', *War & Society*, Vol. 21, No. 1, 2003, p. 67 discusses a 1915 plan by Thomas Mawson, a British town planner, for an industrial group or village settlement for disabled soldiers. The plan never eventuated, possibly because officials believed it segregated disabled men from the wider community instead of attempting to integrate them.

⁷⁷ Final Report ... Settlement or Employment on the Land, *op. cit.*, pp. 10-11, p. 27. The report said disabled men would be capable of farming ventures in fruit and vegetables, pigs or poultry.

⁷⁸ C.J. Duder, ' "Men of the Officer Class": The Participants in the 1919 Soldier Settlement Scheme in Kenya', *African Affairs*, Vol. 92, No. 366, January 1993, pp. 69-87.

a group settlement of eighty cattle farms was established.⁷⁹ The project was considered a failure by 1933, with less than a quarter of the original settlers still in residence.⁸⁰

The Royal Colonial Institute, an influential lobby group promoting loyalty to the British Empire, also advocated soldier settlement for British ex-servicemen in Britain and its Dominions.⁸¹ Reporting on soldier settlement in Canada, New Zealand and Australia, Christopher Turnor stressed the Institute's belief in the importance of group or community settlements.⁸² Kent Fedorowich's study, *Unfit for Heroes*, has two parallel themes which compare the settlement of British soldiers in the Dominions with individual country's schemes for their own returned men.⁸³ Although weighted to considering the fate of British soldier settlers, Fedorowich concluded that the imperial yeoman ideal failed, and that the policy of soldier settlement had major ideological and political defects.⁸⁴ A more recent comparative study of soldier settlement in the British Empire noted most studies have claimed soldier settlement was a failure.⁸⁵ Roche argues this conclusion may be premature, and with more

⁷⁹ D. Lincoln, 'Settlement and Servitude in Zululand, 1918-1948', *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 1, 1995, pp. 49-50.

⁸⁰ *ibid.*, p. 59, p. 56. Settlers had to battle extreme climatic conditions in addition to isolation. The President of the Ntambanana Farmers' Association wrote to authorities in June 1928 that 'our women folk have been living on the farms continuously, at times for years on end without a change or a break in their lives'.

⁸¹ Founded in London in 1868, the Institute described itself as non-political and non-sectarian, see Royal Colonial Institute Yearbook 1916, p. 7. www.archive.org/details/1916yearbook00royauoft, accessed 3 June 2009; C. Turnor, 'Land Settlement for Ex-Service Men in the Oversea Dominions', *Report to the Royal Colonial Institute*, The Saint Catherine Press, London, 1920; D. Kennedy, 'Empire Migration in Post-War Reconstruction: The Role of the Oversea Settlement Committee, 1919-1922', *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 3, Autumn 1988, pp. 403-419.

⁸² Turnor, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

⁸³ K. Fedorowich, *Unfit for Heroes. Reconstruction and Soldier Settlement in the Empire Between the Wars*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1995.

⁸⁴ *ibid.*, p. 191, p. 198.

⁸⁵ M. Roche, 'World War I Empire Discharged Soldier Settlement in Comparative Focus', *History Compass*, Vol. 9, No. 1, 2011, p. 6.

research, 'success' could be redefined.⁸⁶ In Scotland, Leneman's 1991 study of how women contributed not only to the workforce but to the overall farm's success, identified a little-researched area of soldier settlement that will be explored to some extent in this thesis.⁸⁷

In Canada, the idea of colony or group settlements for returned men was not new, with evidence of numbers of ethnic and religious group settlements in Saskatchewan since the late nineteenth century.⁸⁸ Suggestions to introduce group soldier settlements for Canadian veterans began during the war and a considerable time before parliamentary legislation, arguing this would benefit both men and agricultural production. For example, in October 1916 *The New York Times* wrote of Canadian plans 'to stop the town from robbing the country'.⁸⁹ The article contained drawings of a twenty-five acre soldiers' colony with home, barns, orchard, animal enclosures and a tennis court. Canadians it said, realised land was their greatest national asset requiring careful nurturing to increase productivity. It argued that the solution to under-populated lands was to establish colonies or group settlements for returned soldiers, saying they had been 'human machines' during battle and would comfortably embrace co-operative farming.⁹⁰ The plan not only sounded attractive, but feasible.

⁸⁶ *ibid.*, p. 8.

⁸⁷ L. Leneman, 'Fit for Heroines? Women and Scottish Land Settlement after World War I', *Oral History Society*, Vol. 19, No. 2, 1991, pp. 55-58; L. Leneman, 'Land Settlement in Scotland After World War I', *Agricultural History Review*, Vol. 37, No. 1, pp. 52-64.

⁸⁸ Richards, J.H. and Fung, K.I., *Atlas of Saskatchewan*, Modern Press, Saskatoon, 1969, p. 13.

⁸⁹ *The New York Times*, 8 October 1916, p. SM3, 'Canada Plans Farm Colonies for Soldiers. Dominion Government Looks Forward to Establishing Its Fighting Men on the Land and Teaching Them to Grow Successful Crops'.

⁹⁰ *ibid.*

Studies of Canadian soldier settlement after World War I appear to have been hampered by the lack of contemporary government written reports.⁹¹ In addition, as Powell noted, both short and long-term effects of Canadian soldier settlement were further confused by administration for the scheme being combined with the portfolios of immigration and colonisation after 1930.⁹² A study of soldier settlement in British Columbia, for example, reveals that Premier Oliver's efforts to support returned men influenced national policy, even though soldier settlement in the province proved a failure.⁹³

In the case of New Zealand, a country with a primarily agriculturally based economy, a considerable portion of returned men became soldier settlers.⁹⁴ In spite of the importance of soldier settlement to the development of New Zealand in the twentieth century, however, historians and geographers have identified a lack of research in this area.⁹⁵ Some group soldier settlements were implemented in New Zealand, Canada

⁹¹ D.G. Marshall, 'Soldier Settlement in the British Empire', *The Journal of Land and Utility Economics*, Vol. 22, No. 3, 1946, p. 264.

⁹² J.M. Powell, 'Soldier Settlement in Canada 1915-1930', Working Paper No. 7, Department of Geography, Monash University, 1979, p. 33.

⁹³ P.M. Koroscil, 'Soldiers, Settlement and Development in British Columbia, 1915-1930', *BC Studies*, No. 54, Summer 1982, pp. 63-87.

⁹⁴ Fedorowich, *op. cit.*, p. 178 says 9,750 returned men became soldier settlers in New Zealand; J.M. Powell, 'Soldier Settlement in New Zealand 1915-1923', *Australian Geographical Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 2, October 1971, p. 148 has a figure of 17,000; J. Powell, 'The Debt of Honour. Soldier Settlement in the Dominions, 1915-1940', *Journal of Australian Studies*, No. 8, June 1981, p. 74 records the number of soldier settlers receiving financial assistance up to March 1923 was 21,584. There is debate over the true number of soldier settlers in New Zealand post World War I. The reason for these discrepancies may be the definition of 'soldier settler' in this country. Many returned men purchased land under different legislation after WWI, and their success or failure has not been determined. See, for example, M. Roche, 'Failure deconstructed: Histories and geographies of soldier settlement in New Zealand circa 1917-39', *New Zealand Geographer*, Vol. 64, No. 1, April 2008, p. 48. Roche's figures are approximately 10,500; D.G. Marshall, *op. cit.*, p. 261 gives the number of applicants as 15,181 with only 4,112 successful. He stated that 'apparently New Zealand screened the applicants carefully since only 27.1% were given allotments'.

⁹⁵ M. Roche, 'Soldier Settlement in New Zealand After World War I: Two Case Studies', *New Zealand Geographer*, Vol. 58, No. 1, 2002, p. 23; M. Roche, '“Empire, Duty and Land” : Soldier Settlement in New Zealand 1912-1924', in L.J. Proudfoot and M.M. Roche (eds), *(Dis)placing Empire – Renegotiating British Colonial Geographies*, Ashgate Publishing Ltd, Aldershot, 2005, p. 136 noted that New Zealand in 1915, was the first of the British Dominions to legislate for a soldier settlement scheme.

and Britain as part of the overall repatriation process, and will be examined in greater detail later in the thesis.

New Zealand authorities dismissed ideas of group settlement. According to David Guthrie, Minister of Lands, New Zealand ex-servicemen preferred individual farming blocks to the concept of group or community settlements because of their independent spirit.

The government has been quite willing to assist community settlement by New Zealand soldiers, but ... in all co-operative works it has been found that good men are unwilling to work with weaker ones, and it is feared that this would prove to be a disintegrating factor in such communities.⁹⁶

Some group settlements were, however, established in New Zealand, a result of lobbying by the New Zealand Farmers' Union, the Returned Soldiers' Association and other patriotic groups, although how many soldier settlements were communally planned and their eventual success has not been identified.⁹⁷ This activism and involvement by farmers' and returned men's representatives indicates a consensus by both groups that a group settlement environment was best suited to the immediate needs of ex-servicemen seeking land. In New Zealand, as in other countries, advocates of the relatively new profession of town planning believed post-war conditions offered opportunities to initiate innovative plans for re-establishing

⁹⁶ Turnor, *op. cit.*, p. 63. Appendix III. Letter from D.H. Guthrie, Minister of Lands, November 1919 to Christopher Turnor, Esq.

⁹⁷ J.M. Powell, 'Soldier Settlement in New Zealand 1915- 1923', *Australian Geographical Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 2, October 1971, p. 147; see also articles by Michael Roche, who has identified that New Zealand soldier settlement has yet to be thoroughly investigated, 'Soldier Settlement in New Zealand After World War I: Two Case Studies', *New Zealand Geographer*, Vol. 58, No. 1, 2002, pp. 23-32; 'Failure deconstructed: Histories and geographies of soldier settlement in New Zealand circa 1917-39', *New Zealand Geographer*, Vol. 64, 2008, pp. 46-56; 'Farm Amalgamation: A strategy for saving Soldier Settlements in New Zealand during the 1920s and 1930s', *British Review of New Zealand Studies*, Vol. 17, 2008, pp. 67-93.

returned men.⁹⁸ Samuel Hurst Seager's plan for rural settlements, which emphasised providing villages with all the amenities of city life, was never implemented.⁹⁹

In the United States of America, the response from farming communities to suggestions for a soldier settlement scheme for veterans was negative, a distinctively different reaction from other English-speaking nations. American farmers strongly objected to a soldier settlement scheme after World War I, arguing their industry was the only one disadvantaged by proposed government assistance packages. They argued plans to make more farms and increase production would inevitably lead to a depression in agriculture, affecting their livelihood. Farming organisations also branded proposed group settlements as communist-inspired, political thinking associated with the Bolsheviks in Russia.¹⁰⁰

In mid-1917, California enacted a *State Land Settlement Act*, amended in 1919 to include 'soldiers, sailors, marines and others who have served with the armed forces of the United States'.¹⁰¹ A Land Settlement Board, chaired by Elwood Mead, administered this new land policy of closer settlement.¹⁰² As in other countries, World War I had shown Americans the need for social reforms and improved scientific

⁹⁸ C. Miller and M. Roche, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

⁹⁹ *ibid.*, pp. 71-76, p. 79.

¹⁰⁰ B.G. Reid, 'Agrarian Opposition to Franklin K. Lane's Proposal for Soldier Settlement, 1918-1921', *Agricultural History*, Vol. 41, 1967, pp. 170-171; Turnor, *op. cit.*, p. 3, In his report on post-war land settlement in the Dominions, Turnor similarly distanced himself from any association with communist ideology in recommending group settlements.

¹⁰¹ *Report of the State Land Settlement Board of the State of California. September 30, 1920*, California State Printing Office, Sacramento, 1922, p. 59; B.G. Reid, 'Proposed American Plans for Soldier Settlement During the World War I Period', PhD Thesis, University of Oklahoma, 1963, p. 2 states President Woodrow Wilson supported soldier settlement.

¹⁰² P.K. Conkin, 'The Vision of Elwood Mead', *Agricultural History*, Vol. 34, No. 2, 1960, p. 90. The legislation was the first land settlement act passed in the United States.

developments to increase food production.¹⁰³ Mead, a civil engineer originally from Indiana, was Chairman of the State Rivers and Water Supply Commission of Victoria in Australia from 1907 for eight years. During his time in Australia he supervised thirty-two irrigation settlements as part of Victoria's closer settlement land policies. From this experience Mead became a strong supporter of planned land settlement and the concept of governments being responsible for benevolent paternalism.¹⁰⁴

Mead's booklet, *Summary of Soldier Settlements in English-Speaking Countries*, emphasised co-operation between state and federal governments to draft legislation, and argued other countries' schemes were extensions of earlier successful closer settlement land policies.¹⁰⁵ It was the best possible time to implement agricultural reform by introducing American soldier settlement, according to Mead, giving men the opportunity to own land they never dreamed would be within their reach.¹⁰⁶ However, Mead had certain reservations, emphasising many men would be unsuited to a life on the land or would not qualify because they had no capital. In a statement that bears investigation in relation to soldier settlement in Australia, Mead said

if farms were thrown open indiscriminately to settlers without capital, men with no seriousness of purpose and no real interest in agriculture would be willing to take a fling because it costs nothing, and they would be equally willing to abandon the enterprise for some trivial cause.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³ J.M. Powell, 'Elwood Mead and California's State Colonies: An Episode in Australian-American Contacts 1915- 31', *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, Vol. 67, No. 4, 1982, pp. 338-339.

¹⁰⁴ Conkin, *op. cit.*, pp. 88-89.

¹⁰⁵ E. Mead, *Summary of Soldier Settlements in English-Speaking Countries*, Department of the Interior, Government Printing Office, Washington, 1918, p. 5, p. 7. Mead emotively argued 'if we are to meet our responsibilities as other English-speaking countries are meeting theirs' and that the United States was the only English-speaking country without a soldier settlement policy.

¹⁰⁶ E. Mead, 'Placing Soldiers on Farm Colonies', *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 81, 1919, pp. 63-64.

¹⁰⁷ *ibid.*, p. 67.

Leonard Pryor's 1932 thesis 'The Origins of Australia's Repatriation Policy 1914-1920' remains an excellent resource for its analysis of repatriation and the soldier settlement scheme after World War I.¹⁰⁸ Repatriation was an enormous financial burden for the Commonwealth government. Four years after the end of the war, funds from seven ordinary War Loans and two Peace Loans had been completely expended, and more money was needed to fund repatriation programs. In excess of £40 million from Peace Loans had been allocated, which included more than £26 million for soldier land settlement across Australia.¹⁰⁹ *The Digger's Loan*, which authorities hoped would raise £10 million for repatriation and war obligations, was floated in mid-1921 in an effort to finance government plans.¹¹⁰ The loan prospectus noted that although the original estimate for soldier settlement had been £28 million, more men were wanting to become soldier settlers, and with increasing costs to establish these properties, meant there was a significant shortfall of available funds. An estimate for the final cost of the soldier settlement scheme was not mentioned in the literature.¹¹¹ *The Digger's Loan* appealed to the community as both a safe investment and a patriotic duty, but was also a necessity, as expected reparations from Germany had not materialised.¹¹² Formally launched in August 1921, newspapers promoted subscriptions, stressing that 'it recalls deeds and sacrifices that must still inspire all patriotic men and women to do their duty to the returned soldiers, and to use their capital in a form that is both a tribute and an aid'.¹¹³

¹⁰⁸ L.J. Pryor, *op. cit.*

¹⁰⁹ Acting Prime Minister Sir Joseph Cook announced the funds from the Peace Loans and War Loans would be completely expended by November 1921. *The Digger's Loan*, A.J. Mullett, Government Printer, Melbourne, 1921, p. 5.

¹¹⁰ Investors were assured monies from *The Digger's Loan* would only be used for repatriation and war obligations. *ibid.*, p. 19.

¹¹¹ *ibid.*, p. 9.

¹¹² *ibid.*, p. 5, p. 7.

¹¹³ *The Argus*, 8 August 1921, p. 6. 'Diggers' Loan. Campaign Opened To-Day'. A month later, when subscriptions were due to close, £7.5 million had been subscribed, considerably less than the hoped-for £10 million; *ibid.*, 7 September 1921, p. 10.

In assessing the Australian soldier settlement scheme, Pryor argued it was neither experimental nor innovative, as primary producers were civilians both before and after the war.¹¹⁴ This statement, whilst true, takes no account of the impact of service on returned men. Acknowledging there were problems settling some men on the land, he wrote ‘the soldiers were not the easiest persons to settle – their experiences, their temperamental and physical disabilities often rendered them quite unsuitable’.¹¹⁵ Pryor’s work contains insightful conclusions often neglected in the general literature on soldier settlement, stating for example, that government officials responsible for drafting and implementing repatriation policies were ‘just as ignorant of its ultimate implications as any of their contemporaries’.¹¹⁶ An important consideration in critiques of soldier settlement was that due to an emphasis on the war effort rather than post-war plans, legislation was often rushed, ill-prepared and quickly implemented. These shortcomings were reflected in numerous amendments being later required in every state.¹¹⁷

In 1924, the Returned Servicemen’s League Federal Congress resolved to demand the Commonwealth government appoint a Royal Commission to investigate soldier settlements across Australia, in the hopes that the scheme could be stabilised.¹¹⁸ Following meetings between the Federal President and the Prime Minister, Stanley Bruce, Justice Pike was appointed in 1927 and given fifteen terms of reference to

¹¹⁴ Prior, *op. cit.*, p. 177.

¹¹⁵ New South Wales Parliamentary Papers, No. 287 of 1918, p. 45 cited in Pryor, *op. cit.*, p. 226.

¹¹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 277.

¹¹⁷ *ibid.*, p. 278.

¹¹⁸ G.L. Kristianson, *The Politics of Patriotism. The Pressure Group Activities of the Returned Servicemen’s League*, Australian National University Press, Canberra, 1966, p. 38.

investigate.¹¹⁹ Most of the matters Pike was directed to enquire on regarded financial losses, the current economic situation and plans to recover advances from settlers who had forfeited.¹²⁰ Pike was also to investigate how many settlers were ‘unfit for land settlement by reason of their war disabilities’.¹²¹ With pre-existing evidence of failures and forfeitures in several states contained in Parliamentary Debates and Papers, Select Committee Reports and Royal Commissions, the resulting report gave no credence to the possibility of war disabilities continuing to impact on the civilian life of returned men.

A contemporary article analysing the Pike Report concluded it was ‘reassuring’, believing soldier settlement would soon prove economically feasible after blocks had been increased to sustainable living areas.¹²² Confident unsuitable soldier settlers had ‘dropped out long ago’, and according to official figures, only small numbers of settlers were handicapped by war injuries, life on the land had, therefore, proven to be regenerative.¹²³ Analysing the Pike Report, Powell noted claims that selection for prospective soldier settlers was not rigorous enough. Believing all returned men and women were owed a ‘national debt of honour’, Powell implied no applicants should have been rejected because of impairment.¹²⁴ This argument gives powerful credence to the establishment of smallholdings for war-disabled veterans in group settlements, giving every returned man the opportunity to become a farmer and a landowner.

¹¹⁹ *ibid.*, p. 42; Justice Pike, *op. cit.*

¹²⁰ Pike, *ibid.*, pp. 5-6.

¹²¹ *ibid.*, p. 6, p. 21. Only Victoria was mentioned in the final report, with fifty-seven men declared unfit. No mention was made of their financial losses.

¹²² L.F. Giblin, ‘Notes. Losses Due to Soldier Settlement. Report by Mr Justice Pike’, *The Economic Record*, Vol. 5, No. 2, November 1929, p. 338.

¹²³ *ibid.*, p. 339.

¹²⁴ J.M. Powell, ‘The Debt of Honour: Soldier Settlement in the Dominions, 1915-1940’, *Journal of Australian Studies*, No. 8, June 1981, p. 68.

Powell's emotional approach, however, does not consider the financial cost to the economy, an economy already under considerable strain from war-debt.

Given the climatic vagaries of Australian weather and associated problems constantly endured by our farmers, Garton questioned whether soldier settlement was the failure some historians have argued.¹²⁵ However, both McKernan and Cathcart disagree, pointing out that many of these new farmers not only had under-sized properties on marginal lands, but also had to cope with droughts in 1918 to 1920 and 1922 to 1923.¹²⁶ Cathcart, writing about the importance of water in Australia since white settlement, labelled soldier settlement schemes, a 'cruel swindle'.¹²⁷ There is no doubt Australian farmers have rarely experienced the 'easy life' and certainly many long-term farmers have failed.¹²⁸ However, these arguments cannot explain the large scale failure of Australian soldier settlement. War-weary men, many with war-related physical and mental disabilities, often inexperienced and without capital, tried to become farmers after World War I under this scheme and were not successful. There remains much to discover about this facet of Australian post-war history, despite Garton's comment that 'the "troubled" history of soldier settlers is now so well

¹²⁵ Garton, *op. cit.*, p. 119.

¹²⁶ M. McKernan, *Drought. The Red Marauder*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 2005, p. 5; www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@nsf/featurearticlesbyCatalogue/068F13BCCD03F27BCA2569DE00 'Drought in Australia' records major droughts in New South Wales occurred in 1911-1916, 1918-1920, with less severe or intermittent droughts in 1922-1923 and 1926-1929, accessed 29 March 2011; S.M. Wadham, 'Difficulties of Small-Scale Farming in Australia' in G.L. Wood (ed), *Australia. Its Resources and Development*, The Macmillan Co., New York, 1947, p. 144, went even further, stating small-scale farming was unsuitable to Australia because of poor water supplies with few permanent running streams and generally low rainfall, native timbers both hard to work and control, and soils too poor for intensive agriculture. Wadham was a member of the Rural Reconstruction Commission in the 1940s.

¹²⁷ M. Cathcart, *The Water Dreamers. The Remarkable History of our Dry Continent*, The Text Publishing Company, Melbourne, 2009, p. 219.

¹²⁸ See, for example, S. Macintyre, *A Concise History of Australia*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1999; S. Macintyre, *The Oxford History of Australia. Volume 4. 1901-1942 The Succeeding Age*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1986.

known it needs little retelling'.¹²⁹ Writing the history of repatriation in Australia contemporaneously with Garton's *The Cost of War*, Clem Lloyd and Jacqui Rees disagreed with his assessment, noting that the story of soldier settlement remained unclear and would benefit from more extensive research.¹³⁰ In part, this thesis will attempt to address one gap through a study of the group soldier settlements within the County of Cumberland in New South Wales. It will provide a base for further studies into soldier settlement both in New South Wales and Australia.

Through an exploration of the history of these six group settlements in western Sydney, this thesis also explores the growth and development of Sydney in the early decades of the twentieth century. Although there is a wealth of material written about the colonial days of Sydney to the late nineteenth century, led by Karskens, Fitzgerald and Liston, there is limited literature about urban areas outside the immediate area of Sydney in the first half of the twentieth century.¹³¹ An understanding of the growth of Sydney and especially the effects of group soldier settlement after World War I on the development of the County of Cumberland is integral to the current study, although it is outside the confines of this thesis to investigate the government policies that influenced this expansion. Sydney, the first and largest urban area in the colony, grew

¹²⁹ Garton, *op. cit.*, p. 126.

¹³⁰ C. Lloyd, J. Rees, *op. cit.*, p. 219.

¹³¹ See, for example S. Fitzgerald, *Rising Damp Sydney 1870-90*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1987; A. O'Brien, *Poverty's Prison. The Poor in New South Wales 1880-1918*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1988; G. Karskens, *The Colony; A History of Early Sydney*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 2009; G. Karskens, *The Rocks: Life in Early Sydney*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1997; P. Spearitt, *Sydney's Century: a history*, University of New South Wales Press, Sydney, 2000; J. Roe (ed), *Twentieth Century Sydney. Studies in urban and social history*, Hale & Iremonger, Sydney, 1980; C. Forster, *Australian Cities. Continuity and Change*, Second Edn, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1999, p. 15. Forster posits that the early decades of the twentieth century have received little investigation because they were not boom periods; A. Birch, D. Macmillan, *The Sydney Scene 1788-1960*, Hale & Iremonger, Sydney, 1982, p. 237 note Royal Commissions in 1908 and 1912 identified unplanned suburbs and housing shortages. See also various entries in the online history of Sydney from the first human habitation, www.dictionaryofsydney.org, including G. Allison, 'Bankstown Soldier Settlement Milperra'.

without regard to regulation or control from its earliest days.¹³² In the hope of improving conditions, a series of ten weekly reports in *The Sydney Morning Herald* from February to April 1851 described Sydney as a filthy, slum-ridden town.¹³³ With more than three-quarters of the city's population collecting household water from street stand-pipes, and open sewers with a 'leviathan of smells', inner Sydney's sanitation was so revolting that 'the eye sees things that we dare not for decency's sake record on paper'.¹³⁴ Sydney did not have a sewerage system, and seepage from open sewers often contaminated fresh water supplies.¹³⁵ Poor and cramped living conditions in sub-standard housing, resulted in outbreaks of smallpox in 1881 and bubonic plague in 1900.¹³⁶ The high infant mortality rate and deaths of young adults from typhoid in Sydney during the nineteenth century was a further indicator of poor health and living standards.¹³⁷ By the beginning of the twentieth century, Sydney's population had reached nearly half a million and as it expanded, its residents suffered from the urban sprawl, unrestricted by health or building regulations.¹³⁸

Urban planning and building regulations for businesses and homes in Sydney did not receive consideration until a Royal Commission in 1908. The Commission was charged to investigate current conditions, and project Sydney's growth over the next

¹³² R. Gibbons, 'Improving Sydney 1908-1909', in J. Roe (ed), *Twentieth Century Sydney. Studies in urban and social history*, Hale & Iremonger, Sydney, 1980, p. 121.

¹³³ *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 February 1851 to 5 April 1851.

¹³⁴ *SMH*, 8 February 1851, p. 2.

¹³⁵ A. O'Brien, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

¹³⁶ D. Winton, *Sydney's Great Experiment. The Progress of the Cumberland County Plan*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1957, p. 21, p. 23.

¹³⁷ S. Fitzgerald, *op. cit.*, pp. 7-8; R. Mendelsohn, 'The Australian Standard of Living and the Development of Social Welfare' in K. Hancock (ed), *The National Income & Social Welfare*, F. W. Cheshire, Melbourne, 1965, p. 21. In 1901, the official Australian infant mortality rate was nearly 10%.

¹³⁸ M. Alexander, 'Australia: A Settler Society in a Changing World', in J. Walter (ed), *Australian Studies. A Survey*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1989, p. 94; Winton, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

twenty-five years, with a transport network capable of servicing these needs.¹³⁹ Four years later however, little had changed, with Sydney still suffering a severe shortage of housing, indicating living conditions in the city for unskilled and semi-skilled workers remained substandard at least until World War I.¹⁴⁰

At the turn of the twentieth century, more than a third of New South Wales' population lived in Sydney, with population growth closely tied to transport routes. An increase in development occurred after railway electrification in the mid-1920s and increases in motor vehicle ownership in the same period improved communication networks.¹⁴¹

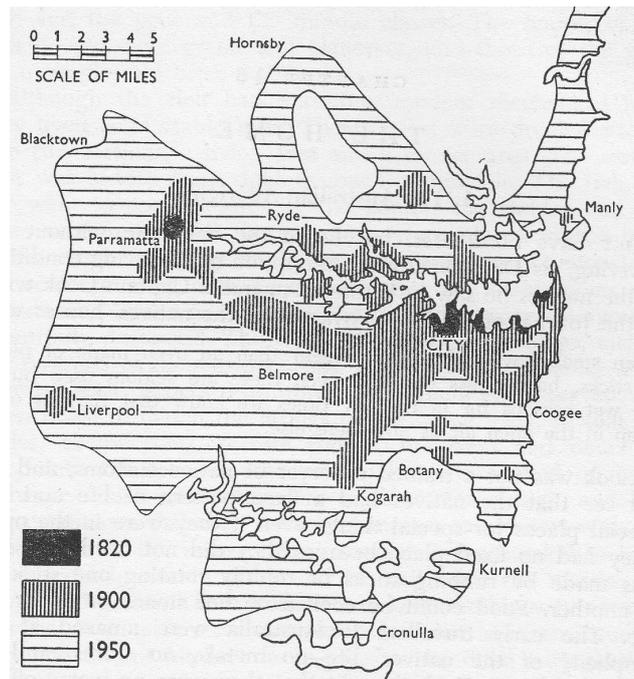
The County of Cumberland, an area of more than 1500 square miles, is bounded by the Nepean and Hawkesbury River systems to the sea at Botany Bay. The County extends from Wiseman's Ferry in the north to Bulli near Wollongong in the south and west to Penrith, incorporating Sydney. Soils in the County are largely sandstone-based or clay and not fertile, although there are areas of richer soil around alluvial riverbanks.¹⁴²

¹³⁹ R. Gibbons, 'Improving Sydney 1908-1909' in J. Roe (ed), *op. cit.*, p. 121, p. 125.

¹⁴⁰ A. Birch and D. Macmillan, *The Sydney Scene 1788-1960*, Hale & Iremonger, Sydney, 1982, p. 237.

¹⁴¹ D. Winton, *op. cit.*, pp. 16-24; Gibbons notes that attempts to plan Sydney and its suburbs resulted in Australia's first town planning enquiry, the Royal Commission for the Improvement of the City of Sydney and its suburbs in 1908; R. Gibbons, *op. cit.*, pp. 120-125.

¹⁴² Winton, *ibid.*, pp. 3-4.



The expansion of Sydney 1788 – 1950.

Source: A.G.L. Shaw & H.D. Nicholson, Growth and Development in Australia. An Introduction to Australian History, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1966, p. 193.

The group soldier settlements in this study were in rural and semi-rural areas, relatively isolated from amenities. The township of Bankstown, with a population under 2,000 before the war, was three miles from Bankstown Soldier Settlement. Even though Bankstown was connected to the railway line in 1909, road networks to the settlement were poor and often subject to flooding.¹⁴³ Soldier settlers at Bankstown, most without the income to purchase and maintain a horse to use for transport, had little option but remain within the confines of their gated community. The area, now known as Milperra, which incorporates the site of Bankstown Soldier

¹⁴³ F.Pollon, *The Book of Sydney Suburbs*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1988, p. 19; New South Wales Parliamentary Debates, Vol. 77, p. 2137; NAA: A2487, *op. cit.*, 1919/2012, Funds for road works Milperra Soldiers' Settlement, Bankstown. The file contains a letter from Bankstown Municipal Council's Town Clerk about roads adjacent to the soldier settlement being impassable during winter 1919.

Settlement, was not extensively developed for residential and light industrial use until after World War II.¹⁴⁴

At the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, the population of the Liverpool area, which incorporated the settlements at Hillview and Chipping Norton, was about 4,000. Whilst this figure increased after 1913, with the new army base at Holsworthy, by the time these group settlements were established, the population for the whole municipality was still less than 7,000.¹⁴⁵ Poor road conditions, with carters reportedly ‘up to [their] waist in water and muck’, combined with severe drought meant that at the turn of the twentieth century Liverpool was not a prosperous district.¹⁴⁶ Orchards and dairying had traditionally been the mainstays of the region, but acreage under cultivation had shrunk because costs of transporting produce to the Sydney markets became economically unviable.¹⁴⁷ The settlements at Doonside, west of Blacktown, and Campbelltown, south-west of Sydney, were in more rural areas with small populations. Although both settlements were located within a reasonable distance of the railway, these communities were still isolated in the early 1920s.¹⁴⁸

Research Methodology

¹⁴⁴ Pollon, *ibid.*, p. 173.

¹⁴⁵ Chipping Norton, named by property owner Alexander Long after an English village in Oxfordshire, had been a farming area from the nineteenth century. C. Keating, *On the Frontier. A Social History of Liverpool*, Hale & Iremonger, Sydney, 1996, p. 143; Pollon, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

¹⁴⁶ Keating, *ibid.*, pp. 121-128, quoting the New South Wales Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works, Report on the Proposed Railway from Liverpool to Mulgoa, 1904, p. 16. Liverpool Council was also heavily in debt during this period, indicating funds were not available to improve services, p. 131.

¹⁴⁷ Acreage under cultivation fell from 5,000 acres in 1895 to approximately 1,700 in 1904, *ibid.*, pp. 125-126.

¹⁴⁸ Doonside, named by settler Robert Crawford after his family estate in Scotland, had a railway siding from 1880, Pollon, *ibid.*, p. 83; Campbelltown’s population in 1915 was 900 with a district population of 3,000. By 1921, the year after the town’s centenary, the town’s population had increased to nearly 2,500 with the district’s major produce being poultry, dairying and fruit growing, W.A. Bayley, *History of Campbelltown NSW*, Campbelltown City Council, Campbelltown, 1965, p. 117, p. 128.

The six group settlements in this study had a total of 189 farms. Of 370 identified settlers, approximately twenty were not returned men, had served in other allied forces or were war workers. Research for this thesis has been primarily archival. State Records of New South Wales is the repository for archived material from the Department of Lands. In October 1916, New South Wales Minister for Lands, William Ashford, created a Returned Soldiers' Settlement Branch within this department, appointing J.G. Bryant as Director.¹⁴⁹ Files created by the branch were recorded regionally, often under the vendor's name, not by the name of the soldier settler.¹⁵⁰ This method of filing has made the identification of soldier settlement properties difficult to locate. Individual soldier settler loan files in New South Wales were listed by number, not by name.¹⁵¹ In some cases, loan files of soldier settlers have been filed with that of an earlier settler on the same block. To further complicate identification, soldier settler files are listed by surname, with only initials recorded for given names. More than 200 loan files have been identified for men on these six settlements, and 179 loan files have been located and examined. A further thirty loan files are not contained in the numerical storage sequence in the archives. Over 150 loan files of soldier settlers from these settlements remain missing, as to date, no other archived material has been located.¹⁵² Similarly, Department of Lands records concerning the establishment and information on original settlers at Campbelltown Soldier Settlement does not appear to have survived. With archived records from the New South Wales Department of Lands either missing or incomplete from the mid-

¹⁴⁹ Pryor, *op. cit.*, p. 193.

¹⁵⁰ SRNSW: Department of Lands, *Closer Settlement Promotion Files*, NRS 8052, NRS 8056, NRS 8057.

¹⁵¹ SRNSW: NRS 8058, *op. cit.*, A State Records volunteer program is listing all surviving loan file numbers against the name and location of soldier settlers, providing easier access for family historians and researchers.

¹⁵² See Appendix A.

1920s, the database containing information gathered from a large number of sources, contains many gaps.¹⁵³

The personnel dossiers of the AIF, held by the National Archives of Australia (NAA), and now digitised, provided vital information on soldier settlers' service and have all been examined during this study.¹⁵⁴ In addition to information about men's pre-war occupations, marital status and age, these files included many, although not all, of the injuries suffered during service. In cases where the date of an injury is recorded in these dossiers, more information on the particular battle or period was located in *The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918*.¹⁵⁵ Repatriation files containing vital information about men's health and claims for benefits after the war, are held by the NAA in Sydney.¹⁵⁶ A total of fifty-one repatriation files were examined, representing a sampling of settlers from all six settlements.¹⁵⁷ Several repatriation files include claims for disabilities such as gassing or psychological problems, some later recognised as war-related, which is information not contained in the service files. Repatriation files have also provided valuable information about how these returned men struggled to support themselves and their families after leaving their soldier settlement farms.

New South Wales and Commonwealth Parliamentary Papers and Debates, and annual reports from the Returned Soldiers' Settlement Branch of the Department of Lands

¹⁵³ See Appendix A.

¹⁵⁴ NAA: B2455, *op. cit.*

¹⁵⁵ C.E.W. Bean, *The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918*, 11th Edition, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1941.

¹⁵⁶ NAA: C138, *op. cit.*

¹⁵⁷ See Appendix A. Requests for approximately another ten files revealed either that the file was now in the archives of another state, was missing or there was no record of an application. Further investigation of files of other returned men was hampered by excessive delays to gain clearance at National Archives.

were examined for information on soldier settlement. Contemporary newspapers, for example *The Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Sydney Mail* and *The Age*, were a valuable source for information not contained in official files, in addition to proof that these soldier settlers worked hard to become successful poultry farmers through competing in poultry shows. Many men on these soldier settlements received training, either at Grantham Stud at Seven Hills or Hawkesbury Agricultural College, prior to being allocated a poultry block. The University of Western Sydney Archives retains some card indexes of returned men who trained at Hawkesbury, and these have been examined to help determine settlers' aptitude and on-going health problems.¹⁵⁸

References throughout this thesis are to the returned men who became soldier settlers on these group settlements. Although members of the Army Medical Corps Nursing Service were eligible for soldier settlement under changes to the legislation in 1919, no nurses have been identified to date in this study as becoming soldier settlers.¹⁵⁹

Despite extensive investigation, no private diaries or contemporary accounts from men on these settlements have been discovered. Contact with a small number of descendants has revealed information not contained in official files, notably about the post-war health of their relative, as well as personal stories of the struggles and simple joys some families had during their time on a small soldier settlement farm.

This thesis contains little of the experiences and hardships of the women and children of returned men on soldier settlements. Although New South Wales' archival records relating to soldier settlement rarely make mention of ex-servicemen's wives and their

¹⁵⁸ UWS Archives AS-401 Student card system, *op. cit.*

¹⁵⁹ SRNSW: Department of Lands, *Returned Soldiers Settlement Miscellaneous Files*, NRS 8056, [19/7028]; S. Williams, 'Soldier Settlement for Returned Army Nurses Post First World War', *When the Soldiers Return: Conference Proceedings*, November 2007, pp. 175-182.

work on the farm, this remains a facet of the cultural history of early twentieth century Australian history demanding separate investigation. This thesis also does not examine any links with Aborigines, aboriginal traditional lands or aboriginal culture. No reference has been found in archival records relating to the current research in reference to these Australians.

This thesis is constructed in four parts. Part One, Ideas and Implementation, provides a background to closer settlement policies in Australia in the nineteenth century, in particular the rise of village settlements that attempted to address the unemployment crisis during the depression years of the 1890s and the utopian movement propounded by William Lane's New Australia. It argues these ideas influenced important Labor politicians, notably former Prime Minister Watson and New South Wales Premier Holman, into promoting group settlement for returned soldiers. This part of the thesis also explains the background to the recommendation made by the Parliamentary War Committee headed by Watson, that Australia establish a soldier settlement scheme after World War I. It considers that there were concerns about implementing such a scheme, notably that inexperienced men would want to take up farming, and that many men may be too physically incapacitated as a result of war injuries to succeed. Part Two of the thesis explains the establishment of the six group purchase soldier settlements in the County of Cumberland in chronological order, providing an overview of each settlement. It includes information on how the government promoted group settlement, assuring returned men they could make a living on these small acreages. It argues that group settlement was not only a policy that would quickly settle inexperienced men on the land, but that initial expectations of low development costs were not realised. Interspersed throughout this part are vignettes of

men who took up land on the blocks on these six group settlements. Part Three, 'Hope' and 'Despair', shows that the returned men on these settlements tried initially to make their new lives successful, and worked to build a strong community by forming Progress Associations, competing in poultry shows and planning social activities for all the residents. By using case studies from all six settlements in both sections of Part Three, an image of life for these soldier settlers is built up, revealing how their initial hopes of being able to make a good living on a small farm soon dissipated. In the final section of this thesis, Part Four, group soldier settlement in other Australian states is investigated, revealing both government and community ideals to establish similar communities to those in this study. It also outlines some of the group soldier settlements established in other English-speaking countries post-war and their success. The following chapter provides details of government inquiries into soldier settlement in New South Wales and Australia, with a particular emphasis on the two inquiries in New South Wales that involved these group settlements. It notes the findings from the 1929 Australia-wide investigation by Justice Pike into soldier settlement and argues that its emphasis was on financial losses to governments, and contained little information on the physical and mental health of soldier settlers ten years into the peace.

As the first major academic study of group soldier settlement in New South Wales, specifically of the six group settlements in the County of Cumberland, it is believed this thesis will be a foundation for further studies both academic and family history-related into the period between the two world wars in Australian society.

For the soldier settlers in this study, group settlement was the New South Wales Labor government's experiment in social welfare. It will be demonstrated in this thesis that the ideal of group settlement, working co-operatively and amongst men with similar war experiences, was not a success. An unemployment scheme for otherwise unemployable war-damaged men, authorities cannot be blamed for instituting a land scheme that had little chance of success. No-one knew how long the war would last or how horrendous conditions for the soldiers would be. Most importantly, the long-term effects of modern trench warfare on combatants remained an unknown that no official policy could begin to address during and immediately after the war. Men who volunteered to serve their country and empire were promised they would be looked after on their return. They wanted work, not charity. A scheme to increase primary production by placing returned men on the land under generous repayment terms appeared to be a fitting reward. For large numbers of returned men on the settlements in this study, it was not. Most failed, forfeiting their farm and left with nothing.

Chapter Two

Ideas

Within a year of the commencement of World War I the Australian Commonwealth government began considering plans for the return of its troops. In July 1915 a Federal Parliamentary War Committee was formed, comprising six members each from the two major political parties. Its primary function was to formulate plans for the repatriation of Australian forces after the war. Former Prime Minister, John Christian (Chris) Watson, was appointed Honorary Organiser of the sub-committee considering the employment of returned men. A three page report was issued in August 1915 with one of the recommendations being the settling of men on the land.¹

In early February 1915, the Commonwealth Minister for Defence, George Pearce, wrote to Prime Minister Andrew Fisher advising him of a proposal by Jack Lang.²

Lang, a New South Wales Labor parliamentarian, suggested a post-war land settlement scheme for returned men, recommending they be settled in groups so they could work co-operatively. Watson had presented Lang's proposal to Pearce during a

¹ National Archives of Australia: Prime Minister's Department; A2, *Correspondence files, annual single number series, 1 January 1895 – 31 December 1926*; 1916/3631 Hon JC [John Christian] Watson, [Former Prime Minister] (Appointment as Honorary Organiser in regard to Scheme to provide employment for Returned Soldiers). See also appointment of Mr. D.J. Quinn as Secretary. Letter from Secretary Federal Parliamentary War Committee, 26 August 1915; NAA: Repatriation Department; A2479, *Correspondence file, annual single number series, 1916-1918*, 17/1050 Federal Parliamentary War Committee Printed Papers, 'Employment of Returned Soldiers' 12 August 1915, 'Returned Soldiers. Employment and Settlement', 17 September 1915; C. Lloyd, J. Rees, *The Last Shilling. A History of Repatriation in Australia*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1994, pp. 29-30.

² Lang was actively involved in his local area before entering State politics in the Starr-Bowkett Society, a co-operative association for home buyers, his local Progress Association and was Mayor of Auburn, a western Sydney suburb from 1909 to 1911. Leader of the Labor Party in New South Wales from 1923 and Premier and Treasurer from 1925, Lang was instrumental in banning communism in 1924. Premier during the depression years, Lang was a controversial politician who believed his policies of 'State rightism' would benefit the population. B. Nairn, 'Lang, John Thomas (Jack) (1876 – 1975)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/lang-john-thomas-jack-7027/text12223>, accessed 11 July 2011; NAA: A2, *op. cit.*, 1915/3659, Soldiers – Settlement on land on return. Letter No 4199, Commonwealth Department of Defence to Prime Minister Fisher, 5 February 1915.

visit to Sydney several months before his appointment to the war committee. Lang's proposal was quickly circulated to all state Premiers from the Prime Minister's office, seeking their views. Most states agreed, with Queensland the only state with a dissenting voice, saying the proposal only catered for men suited to farming and would prove impractical to implement.³ The comments from Queensland imply that a scheme based on Lang's proposal would allow too many returned men to go onto the land without adequate checks and balances to weed out those who had little chance of success either through inexperience, aptitude or health.

The Federal Parliamentary War Committee's report, *Returned Soldiers. Employment and Settlement*, released in September 1915, investigated many avenues for the employment of ex-soldiers, included soldier settlement. It acknowledged that a major difficulty with any project for settling returned soldiers on the land was 'the problem of settling the moneyless man in a calling which requires capital'.⁴ This report also included Lang's original suggestion that, where possible, co-operative groups should be established.⁵ Recognising public sentiment was important for the successful introduction of such a large project, the report also suggested that the press be co-opted to emphasise the advantages for the nation.⁶ Accordingly, Watson spoke positively about the proposed scheme's success to newspapers. 'I do not deny that there may be difficulties', he said, 'other than that of finance in turning the soldier into a farmer; but they are not insurmountable'.⁷

³ *ibid.*, The circular letter was dispatched to State Premiers asking if their government would give consideration to a soldier settlement scheme on 13 February 1915. The suggestion of group settlement was not included in the circular to Premiers.

⁴ NAA: A2479 17/1050, *op. cit.*, 'Returned Soldiers. Employment and Settlement', p. 3; M. Lake, *The Limits of Hope*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1987, p. 28.

⁵ *ibid.*, p. 3.

⁶ *ibid.*, p. 4.

⁷ *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 2 December 1915, p. 7.

Offers relating to land settlement became one of the enticements for enlistment during the war. Many men enlisted believing their post-war livelihoods were assured even though a standard policy was not developed Australia-wide.⁸ Although it was later argued land policy was so critical to Australia's economy that promises should never have been made, the introduction of a soldier settlement scheme across Australia appeared a logical extension of individual states' closer settlement land policies already in place.⁹ It was a way to show the nation's gratitude to returned soldiers and to extend the populated areas of the country.

In Chapter Two, it will be argued that the introduction of an Australian soldier settlement scheme after World War I was a policy of closer settlement, albeit exclusively for ex-servicemen and women. The chapter will begin with a brief exploration of the history of closer settlement in Australia, followed by an examination of the utopian movement across Australia and the labour settlements for the unemployed established during the depression years of the 1890s. This chapter will argue that the ideals of leading Labor politicians, notably Jack Lang, Chris Watson and William Holman, influenced later policies in New South Wales and were precursors to soldier settlement policies after World War I. Group settlement, the tenure examined in this study of soldier settlement after World War I, was an intensive form of closer settlement. Although small group soldier settlement was not widely used in Australia, it is important to realise that this particular type of settlement, promoted by the New South Wales government, was not a new

⁸ L.J. Pryor, 'The Origins of Australia's Repatriation Policy 1914-1920', M.A. Thesis, University of Melbourne, 1932, p. 179.

⁹ Lloyd & Rees, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

phenomenon. There were other group soldier settlements across Australia and in other countries, and how they functioned and survived will be addressed later in the thesis.

A discussion of the early history of closer settlement in Australia is necessary when attempting to comprehend why it was strongly encouraged in New South Wales for returned soldiers. The Australian Soldier Settlement Scheme after World War I was a form of closer settlement policy, designed to increase the farming population and primary production. Why some Australian states chose communal or group settlement as tenures in their soldier settlement schemes given the failures twenty years earlier is difficult to understand. Subdividing one property into a number of smallholdings was economically practical, allowing men to be quickly settled as well as being more economically viable, but gave no better guarantees for success than traditional forms of land settlement.

Early history of closer settlement in Australia

From the nineteenth century individual Australian states had evolved land policies that aimed at creating smaller landholdings. These closer settlement policies were meant to not only increase rural populations but also create a solid conservative class, highly lauded in British ideals as the yeoman class.¹⁰ Severe unemployment in the

¹⁰ See, for example, K.L. Fry, *Soldier Settlement and the Australian Agrarian Myth after the First World War*, Australian National University Press, Canberra, 1973, p. 3; M. Lake, 'The Power of Anzac' in M. McKernan and M. Browne (eds), *Australia, Two Centuries of War and Peace*, Allen & Unwin, Australia, 1988, p. 214; R. Waterhouse, *The Vision Splendid. A Social and Cultural History of Rural Australia*, Curtin University Books, Fremantle, 2005, p. 201; C.J. King, *An Outline of Closer Settlement in New South Wales. Part 1. The Sequence of the Land Laws 1788-1956*, Division of Marketing and Agricultural Economics, Department of Agriculture, New South Wales, 1957, p. 161; J.M. Powell, *Mirrors of the New World*, Australian National University Press, Canberra, 1978, pp. 49-93; In planning land settlement for returned men after World War II, the Rural Reconstruction Commission noted that one of the faults in World War I soldier settlement was the 'over-emphasis of the idea of a farm for each man which is partly based on political considerations and partly on beliefs in some quarters that a "bold peasantry" is the most desirable structure for the countryside'. The Rural Reconstruction Commission, *Land Utilisation and Farm Settlement. Third Report*, June 1944, p. 106.

depression years of the 1890s saw governments respond by enacting legislation to create communal village settlements in many states, settlements which largely failed within a short time. In the same period, utopian settlements such as William Lane's New Australia venture on Paraguay were established.¹¹ Concurrent with this period was the rise of the Labor Party within Australia.

The concept of closer settlement, the subdivision of large pastoral properties into smaller agricultural portions, was a government land policy. Its purpose was to assist prospective farmers who had little capital to purchase their own property.¹² This policy of small-scale farming was endorsed by politicians and citizens living in urban areas in the former British colonies, and was based more on nostalgia than economics suitable for the Australian landscape.¹³ Arcadian ideals of the benefits of rural life reflected British thinking of the eighteenth and nineteenth century in response to the realities of life in towns born of the Industrial Revolution.¹⁴

The 'back-to-the-land movement' or 'agrarian myth' was a phenomenon in many British settler societies from late in the nineteenth century, and was the precursor for

¹¹ A. Whitehead, *Paradise Mislaid. In Search of the Australian Tribe of Paraguay*, University of Queensland Press, Brisbane, 1997.

¹² S. Haswell, 'Closer Settlement in NSW, 1904-18: The Issue of Compulsory Land Resumption', Student Research Essay No 3, Australian National University, 1987, p. 1; Land Utilization and Farm Settlement. 3rd Report, *op. cit.*, p. 106 listing faults in earlier closer settlement policies, noted that the over-emphasis on individual farms was based to some extent on the belief in the worth of 'bold peasantry'.

¹³ S.M. Wadham, 'Difficulties of Small-Scale Farming in Australia', in G.L. Wood (ed), *Australia. Its Resources and Development*, The Macmillan Co., New York, 1947, p. 139; R. Linn, *Battling the Land. 200 Years of Rural Australia*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1999, p. 114.

¹⁴ M. Williams, 'More and Smaller is Better: Australian Rural Settlement 1788-1914', in J.M. Powell and M. Williams (eds), *Australian Space Australian Time. Geographical Perspectives*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1975, p. 62.

many forms of small land settlement in Australia.¹⁵ There was a strong belief in the need for a yeoman class in society, to strengthen the agricultural underpinning of the Australian, Canadian and New Zealand economies. The English yeoman class represented self-reliance, dependability and conservativeness. Yeoman's smallholdings were therefore viewed as the most efficient way to increase production and population in the British settler societies.¹⁶ The British government expected its Commonwealth and former imperial nations to grow fresh produce to feed its population and provide natural resources for its industries, in addition to being the migration destination for its citizens.¹⁷ Despite increasing industrialisation, the economies of former British Empire countries such as Australia still largely relied on primary industry into the twentieth century.¹⁸

In the late nineteenth century in America and Europe the creation of a 'New World' was considered possible by many social reformers. These ideas made their way to Australia. An American political economist, Henry George, for example, advocated changes to land policies, appealing to the working classes who could see no future for themselves as land owners under traditional rules of ownership.¹⁹ George believed the never-ending cycle of poverty was inextricably linked with the growth of new industrial cities of the world, convinced 'this association of poverty with progress is

¹⁵ W.P. Reeves, *State Experiments in Australia and New Zealand. Volume 1*, Macmillan of Australia, Melbourne, 1969, p. 133.

¹⁶ L.G. MacGillivray, 'Land and People: European Land Settlement in the South-East of South Australia, 1840-1940', PhD Thesis, University of Adelaide, 1983, p. xi.

¹⁷ K. Fedorowich, *Unfit for Heroes. Reconstruction and Soldier Settlement in the Empire Between the Wars*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1995, p. 32; C.A. Lockwood, 'From Soldier to Peasant? The Land Settlement Scheme in East Sussex, 1919- 1939', *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 3, 1998, p. 439.

¹⁸ S. Macintyre, *The Oxford History of Australia. Volume 4. 1901-1942 The Succeeding Age*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1993, p. 27.

¹⁹ J. M. Powell, 'Utopia, millenium and the co-operative ideal: a behavioural matrix in the settlement process', *Australian Geographer*, Vol. 11, No. 6, September 1971, p. 608.

the great enigma of our times' that could be alleviated by common property ownership.²⁰ Even in the twentieth century, advocates of the 'back-to-the-land movement' in America argued overpopulation in urban areas was to blame for social problems associated with unemployment and poor health. An argument for developing virgin country was that 'the harder the land is to bring into production the greater is the yield of virtue'.²¹ At the turn of the twentieth century, Pember Reeves a New Zealand-born politician, wrote, "Why don't they go to the land?" is the question asked by every European that hears that, in Australia and New Zealand, there are at times unemployed men clamouring for work'.²²

They did try, but failures were high in village settlements formed in the 1890s, with many abandoned within a few years. The benefit of rural living was nevertheless a concept hard to dismiss, with Reeves concluding that 'a plot of land, though a bad crutch, may be a good staff for a working man'.²³ Reeves' summary of village settlements contains truths pertinent to problems experienced with soldier settlement schemes decades later. He noted success was more likely when the settler had farming experience and good land with good rainfall. He also believed settlers working the land co-operatively faced great difficulties unless there were underlying strong ties to maintain the bonds of teamwork.²⁴

²⁰ H. George, *Progress & Poverty*, Dent, London, 1976, p. 12; see also B. Scates, *A New Australia. Citizenship, Radicalism and the First Republic*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1997.

²¹ R. White, 'Poor Men on Poor Lands: The Back-to-the-Land Movement of the Early Twentieth Century: A Case Study', *The Pacific Historical Review*, Vol. 49, No. 1, February 1980, p. 111.

²² W.P. Reeves, *op. cit.*, p. 299.

²³ *ibid.*, p. 300.

²⁴ *ibid.*, p. 310, p. 320.

Legislation for land usage in the Australian colonies in the nineteenth century followed overseas trends, but without accounting for the vastly different climatic and soil conditions of the continent.²⁵ A major problem with Australian land settlement policies was the lack of investigation into the sustainability and effects of intensive farming over a long period.²⁶ The need to pay for the railway boom of the 1880s, with increased passenger and freight usage was evident. Closer settlement policies which encouraged a broader population distribution could result in improved returns on these new lines. The rationale was improved transport and communication services would slow the population's drift to the cities, and bring political stability.²⁷ However, the economic crisis of the 1890s forced Australian colonies to reassess their land policies in terms of employment possibilities and property size. Closer settlement land policies were generally viewed by governments and the nation as 'a universal panacea' for the current economic difficulties.²⁸

Utopia

Another group closely tied to the closer settlement ideal included the utopian lifestyle movement that advocated co-operative living in group settlements. Developed across Australia in the late 1800s, these ideas were broadcast through publications such as *The Bulletin*, *The Voice* and *The Clipper*.²⁹ Australian utopian writers included Catherine Spence who wrote *A Week in the Future* in 1888, Austin South who set his

²⁵ Wadham, *op. cit.*, p. 139.

²⁶ M. Keneley, 'Closer settlement in the Western District of Victoria: a case study in Australian land use policy, 1898- 1914', *Journal of Historical Geography*, Vol. 28, No. 3, 2002, p. 375.

²⁷ Connors, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

²⁸ Keneley, *op. cit.*, p. 368.

²⁹ B. Metcalf (ed), *From Utopian Dreaming to Communal Reality. Cooperative Lifestyles in Australia*, University of New South Wales Press, Sydney, 1995, p. 18; D. Gobbett, 'South Australian Village Settlement: A Centenary Perspective', *South Australian Geographical Journal*, Vol. 94, 1995, p. 54, notes that *The Voice* suggested village settlements would suit those who believed in the principles of New Australia, but were not able to go to Paraguay.

1893 book *In Those Days, or, Life in the Twentieth Century* in Brisbane in the year 1995 and William Lane's, *The Workingman's Paradise*, set in Sydney and outback Queensland.³⁰ Lane, a journalist and editor of *The Worker* in Queensland, was a strong supporter of the utopian movement. He was instrumental in forming the State Aided Village Settlement Committee, and a settlement at Alice River in response to unemployment associated with the Queensland shearers' strike.³¹ In 1891, *The Worker* published the election platform for the Queensland association, the Australian Labour Federation, advocating endorsement of state-aided village settlements by all Labor candidates.³² Lane's continuing belief in the benefits of village settlements was revealed in 1895 through advertising for a proposed Social Co-operative Congress in Sydney where the formation of co-operative village settlements headed the agenda.³³ In 1891, *The Bull-Ant*, printed in Melbourne, advertised farms on three co-operative irrigation settlements in Victoria, adding that negotiations were under way for several more similar settlements.³⁴

From the 1890s, village settlements targeting the unemployed were established in New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia with both financial assistance and favourable tenure terms offered by each government.³⁵ Based on the principle of 'work, not alms', labour colonies or village settlements for the unemployed were

³⁰ Metcalf, *ibid.*, p. 15.

³¹ The State Aided Village Settlement Committee was formed in 1887, Alice River settlement in 1891. L. Blake, 'Village Settlements', *Victorian Historical Magazine*, Vol. 37, 1966, p. 191.

³² D. J. Murphy, R. B. Joyce, C. A. Hughes (eds), *Prelude to Power. The Rise of the Labour Party in Queensland 1885-1915*, The Jacaranda Press, Brisbane, 1970, pp. 267-291, appendix: *The Worker*, 7 March 1891.

³³ *The Worker*, 26 October 1895, p. 2.

³⁴ www.reasoninrevolt.net.au, accessed 6 March 2010, *The Bull-Ant*, 3 March 1891, p. 15; A. Tremayne, 'Co-operative Irrigation Colonies', accessed 5 August 2010; The Quantong Co-operative Settlement near Horsham, 200 miles from Melbourne, was later said to have been a successful land scheme of this company. *The Argus*, 4 June 1894, p. 6; *The Brisbane Courier*, 22 March 1933, p. 13.

³⁵ B. Fitzpatrick, *The British Empire in Australia. An Economic History 1834-1939*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1941, p. 374.

considered to be a positive form of charity relief.³⁶ Unemployed men living in a village settlement were assured they could become self-supporting, thereby breaking the cycle of reliance on charities to feed and house their families. Village settlement promised a better life, idealised by fresh air and fresh food in the open spaces. In reality, it was often inferior quality land, worked by inexperienced men with few resources or capital. As Bellanta concisely summaries, the ideals of village settlements were ‘anti-pastoral, anti-urban and generally anti-capitalist’.³⁷ In Roberts’ *History of Australian Land Settlement* he argued that 1890s village settlements across Australia were failures, whether intended for small farming blocks or colonies for the unemployed.³⁸ He stressed that ‘communal settlement was inherently weak, [and] co-operative settlement hindered by a lack of the spirit of co-operation’.³⁹

However, it is William Lane who is the most well-known proponent of community settlement. Lane, a utopian socialist, arrived in Brisbane in 1885, becoming founding editor of the Australian Labor Federation’s paper, *The Worker*, in 1890.⁴⁰ The Australian Labor Federation, born out of the Brisbane Trades and Labour Council in June 1889, would represent ‘New Unionism’ and take trade unions to unskilled workers.⁴¹ In the 1880s, Lane applied to the South Australian government for a grant of land near Lake Bonney on the Murray River, to establish a communal settlement

³⁶ J. Mavor, ‘Labor Colonies and the Unemployed’, *The Journal of Political Economy*, Vol. 2, No. 1, December 1893, p. 26, p. 30. The author argued that labor colonies of the late nineteenth century were not a new idea. Since the early 1800s labor colonies, also known as beggar or free colonies, had existed in Belgium, Denmark, Holland, Switzerland, France, England and Germany.

³⁷ M. Bellanta, ‘Clearing Ground for the New Arcadia: Utopia, Labour and Environment in 1890s Australia’, *Journal of Australian Studies*, No. 72, 2002, p. 14.

³⁸ S.H. Roberts, *History of Australian Land Settlement. 1788-1920*, Macmillan of Australia, Melbourne, 1924, p. 350.

³⁹ *ibid.*, p. 353.

⁴⁰ J. Kellett, ‘William Lane and “New Australia”: a Reassessment’, *Labour History*, No. 72, May 1997, p. 1.

⁴¹ *ibid.*, p. 5.

for up to 250,000 people.⁴² Unsuccessful in this venture, and unable to find suitable land for a co-operative settlement in Australia, Lane announced a decade later that Paraguay was the chosen location for a communal settlement to be called 'New Australia'. It has been suggested a major reason for choosing South America was to discourage anyone not prepared for hard work from applying.⁴³ In advertising the proposal, the *Journal of the New Australia Co-operative Settlement Association* promised a better life for colonists than they could ever achieve in Australia. 'A home and a wife, simple pleasures and plenty, is what men will get in "New Australia"' it stated, 'by being able to work when they like, by working together, and by getting what they earn'.⁴⁴ Reports of the failure of forty-seven similar enterprises in the United States in 1891 appeared to have little impact on either Lane's South American plans or for other co-operatives in Australia.⁴⁵

Support for Lane's project to establish a community settlement in South America came from unlikely quarters. Retiring Chief Justice, Sir Charles Lilley encouraged the enterprise as a way to improve workers' lives. Writing to William Lane, he said

The workers for hundreds of years have had the heavier burden of our life, and no plan should be left untried to make a fairer distribution in accord with every aspiration ... towards the amelioration of the social life of all classes, and more especially to those who most need our help, that is, the ignorant, the untrained and the poor.⁴⁶

⁴² M. Williams, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

⁴³ G. Souter, 'William Lane (1861-1917)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol. 9, Melbourne University Press, 1983, pp. 658-659.

⁴⁴ *New Australia. The Journal of the New Australia Co-operative Settlement Association*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 19 November 1892, p. 1. <http://setis.library.usyd.edu.au/rare/newoz/>, accessed 3 February 2010.

⁴⁵ Blake, *op. cit.*, p. 191.

⁴⁶ L. Ross, *William Lane and the Australian Labor Movement*, self-published, Sydney, 1935, pp. 164-165.

In July 1893, Chris Watson, President of the New South Wales Trades and Labour Council, and later the world's first Labor Prime Minister, chaired a mass meeting at the Domain in Sydney. The meeting was in support of Broken Hill strike leaders, the seamen's strike, and to farewell New Australia colonists leaving on the *Royal Tar*. Another speaker at the meeting was William Holman, also a member of the Council. Holman addressed the crowd saying he believed the South American co-operative settlement would be successful, a community 'in which there shall be work for all and over-work for none, and where every man and woman shall have the liberty to live under fair conditions'.⁴⁷ Charles Holman, aged twenty and a cabinetmaker like his brother, was one of the colonists.⁴⁸

William Lane was confident New Australia would be successful because of his strong belief in the Australian man-on-the-land's mateship mentality, a feature of war historian C.E.W. Bean's later writings about the men of the Australian Imperial Force.⁴⁹ Lane's ideals to build a community working co-operatively together are perhaps best summarised in Henry Lawson's prose in *New Australia* in March 1894,

'Tis the hope of something better than the present or the past;
'Tis the wish for something better – strong within us till the last
'Tis the longing for redemption as our ruined souls descend
'Tis the hope of something better that will save us in the end.⁵⁰

The utopian ideal of New Australia and Cosmé failed to materialise, as both settlements struggled to become self-sufficient in food and to overcome problems of social discontent. *The Brisbane Courier* reported in December 1896 that 'they were

⁴⁷ *SMH*, 10 July 1893, p. 6.

⁴⁸ *The Brisbane Courier*, 21 July 1893, p. 6.

⁴⁹ Murphy, Joyce & Hughes, *op. cit.*, p. 183.

⁵⁰ H. Lawson, *New Australia*, March 1894 quoted in A. Whitehead, *Paradise Misland. In Search of the Australian Tribe of Paraguay*, University of Queensland Press, Brisbane, 1997, p. 25.

not doing well, either of them, and were very hard up, and though a man can live there, there is no market for anything in the way of agricultural produce'.⁵¹ Charles Holman was disillusioned after only a short time in Paraguay, and had left the settlement by May 1894.⁵² In 1899, William Lane and his family left Paraguay to settle in New Zealand.⁵³ The influence of community settlement ideals envisaged by Lane, notably on politicians Watson and Holman, cannot be ignored in the light of soldier settlement policies developed twenty-five years later in New South Wales.

During the period between 1890 and the early years of the twentieth century, approximately 20,000 people across Australia received assistance to join community settlements, with most proving unsuccessful within a few years. Settlements were often isolated and farming blocks too small, and combined with the men's inexperience in farming, obstacles were created that inevitably led to failure.⁵⁴ Powell labelled these settlements as 'state socialism in the bush', experiments that had unnatural levels of dependence between the government and the settlers. As the majority of settlements were government initiatives, governments were seen as responsible for their failures.⁵⁵ This economic reliance by settlers on the government has similarities with the economic failure of soldier settlement only a generation later.

The Soldier Settlement Scheme across Australia after World War I could similarly be viewed as a social experiment, an attempt by Commonwealth and state governments

⁵¹ *Brisbane Courier*, 31 December 1896, p. 5.

⁵² *SMH*, 12 May 1894, p. 9.

⁵³ Metcalf, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

⁵⁴ B. Scates, *A New Australia. Citizenship, Radicalism and the First Republic*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1997, p. 118, p. 131, p. 205.

⁵⁵ J.M. Powell, 'Patrimony of the people: The role of government in land settlement', in R.L. Heathcote (ed), *The Australian Experience. Essays in Land Settlement and Resource Management*, Longman Cheshire Pty Ltd, Melbourne, 1988, p. 18.

to improve the civilian lives of returned soldiers. The resemblance to a form of rural socialism becomes even stronger when group soldier settlements of numbers of men working co-operatively on small acreages is considered. Among ex-servicemen who tried and failed on the group settlements in this study were men who saw this type of farming as a way to regain their dignity, unable to return to their previous manual labour, and others who hoped farming life would help them recover their physical and mental health.

The following section of this chapter will examine each Australian colony and state to ascertain the background of communal or group settlements. This analysis will assist in gaining an understanding of why New South Wales was the only state that would encourage small-acreage group soldier settlement post World War I.

The Victorian *Settlement on Lands Act* of 1893 was an example of legislation that attempted to address unemployment in Melbourne, measures described by Powell as a 'regenerative social experiment'.⁵⁶ It is estimated approximately 10,000 people in Victoria lived in more than eighty new village settlements during the 1890s.⁵⁷ In less than a year 4,000 unemployed men applied to join village settlements, either believing the communal settlement ideal had real merit or simply due to desperation.⁵⁸

In March 1892, Reverend Horace Finn Tucker established the Tucker Village Settlements Association. The following month a correspondent to *The Argus* wrote

⁵⁶ J. M. Powell, 'An Australian Utopia', *Australian Geographer*, Vol. 12, No. 4, p. 328. Powell states unemployment in Melbourne was 28 per cent in 1893.

⁵⁷ *ibid.*, p. 328.

⁵⁸ Blake, *op. cit.*, p. 193.

that Tucker's project was doomed if good quality agricultural land was not found for the settlements.⁵⁹ Publishing the novel, *The New Arcadia. An Australian Story* in 1894, Tucker explained the benefits of co-operative group or village settlements. His ideology, an innovative social ideal, was underpinned by a belief in the British yeoman tradition. As he noted, 'scratch the Englishman, wherever he lives, and you will find the farmer beneath the surface, and the earth-hunger at his breast ... It makes him the colonising creature of the world'.⁶⁰ Tucker's Village Settlements were short-lived, ending after only four years. Poor land and leadership contributed to the failure, although it is difficult to comprehend how seven communities comprising 700 families could cease to exist so quickly.⁶¹

Only a few years after legislation designed for village settlements, a closer settlement bill was brought before the Victorian parliament. The 1898 amendment to the Land Act made Crown lands acquisition possible after agreement by both houses of parliament. Crown lands procurement was thereafter controlled by politicians, and land acquisition under this act was, as a result, often slowed down by bureaucracy.⁶² The Victorian *Closer Settlement Act of 1904* aimed to simplify the process. However, the newly-appointed Lands Purchase and Management Board responsible for land valuation of estates and allotting lands after subdivision, functioned only part-time with all power remaining vested in the Minister.⁶³ The maximum value of land for farms was £1500 in order to recover costs, but in reality it meant many approved

⁵⁹ *The Argus*, 27 April 1892, p. 6. The writer claimed this had been a critical oversight when land had been selected.

⁶⁰ *ibid.*, p. 329 quoting from H. F. Tucker, *The New Arcadia*, Melbourne, 1894, p. 23.

⁶¹ Metcalf, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

⁶² Keneley, *op. cit.*, p. 368.

⁶³ G. Taylor, 'The Problem of Closer Settlement in Victoria', *Economic Record*, Vol. 12, No. 1, June 1937, p. 57.

blocks did not constitute a living area. Local land boards were responsible for interviewing and ranking applicants and allocating blocks. Repayment terms were spread over more than thirty years.⁶⁴ In 1909, Premier Murray admitted in parliament that closer settlement had been largely a failure, whilst some members argued the government was taking enormous risks by allowing men with little or no capital to be allocated intensive farming blocks and be eligible for further state financial assistance.⁶⁵ The 1914 Victorian Royal Commission charged with investigating closer settlement found at least twenty per cent of land acquired under the existing legislation was unsuitable for intensive farming and almost half the 2,000 settlers were either likely to fail, or had already done so.⁶⁶ The Commission, concluding closer settlement from 1904 had been economically unjustified, found many farms in non-irrigated areas were too small, and men with little capital had been allocated properties, incurring heavy personal debts.⁶⁷

From the mid-nineteenth century, the focus of land policy in Queensland was the development of rural industries, and closer settlement was integral to these policies. Closer settlement rather than greater urbanisation or the expansion of industries, was expected to be the state's economic backbone. However, the lack of agricultural lands and crops suitable to Queensland conditions, in addition to transportation problems

⁶⁴ Keneley, *op. cit.*, p. 369; Taylor, *op. cit.*, p. 58, notes The Act was amended in 1906 to allow up to £250 for a home or improvements, repayable over twenty years.

⁶⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 58-59, quoting speech of J. E. Mackay, *Victorian Parliamentary Debates* 1909, pp. 1125-1131.

⁶⁶ Keneley, *op. cit.*, p. 369.

⁶⁷ Taylor, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

and distance to markets were distinct disadvantages to an increase in intensive farming, leaving livestock grazing the dominant primary industry in their economy.⁶⁸

In Queensland, the answer to the 1890s depression was *The Co-operative Communities Land Settlement Act* in 1893, a response to both unemployment and the growth of the Labor Party. Several communities were formed under this legislation with an estimated total population of 2,000.⁶⁹ Following the 1891 Shearers' Strike, the Alice River Co-operative Settlement near Barcaldine was formed but within two years only a few of the original seventy-plus men remained.⁷⁰ In April 1894, *The Queenslander* reported that the village settlement, 'Nil Desperandum' near Roma, comprised thirty families who had cleared and planted crops, and built several homes and temporary dwellings on the site.⁷¹ *The Brisbane Courier* carried many stories about the co-operative settlement 'New Australia' in Paraguay mentioned earlier, and similar village settlements in Queensland, indicating continued community interest in this land tenure.⁷² During this period the Queensland government supported the establishment of co-operative sugar mills on sugar plantations, promoting small-scale farming whilst minimising the capital outlay by individual farmers.⁷³ Optimism was short-lived however, as the Queensland Secretary of the Department of Agriculture stated in 1895 that village settlement was a failure. He believed the failures proved

⁶⁸ D. Cameron, 'Closer settlement in Queensland: the rise and decline of the agrarian dream – 1860s to the 1960s', in G. Davison, M. Brodie (eds), *Struggle Country: the rural ideal in twentieth century Australia*, Monash University ePress, 2005, p. 06.1; E.G. Coppel, A. R. Henderson, H.P. Levy, R. J. Lowenstein, L. Mann, P. D. Phillips, 'Compulsory Acquisition of Land in Australia', *Journal of Comparative Legislation and International Law*, Third Series, Vol. 3, No. 4, 1921, p. 252, Another factor restricting closer settlement was legislation which allowed only properties valued over £20,000 to be acquired by the Crown.

⁶⁹ Cameron, *ibid.*, p.06.6.

⁷⁰ Metcalf, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

⁷¹ *ibid.*, p. 27.

⁷² *Brisbane Courier*, 22 December 1893, p. 5.

⁷³ G. Bolton, *A Fine Country to Starve In*, University of Western Australia Press, Perth, 1972, p. 32.

this was 'yet another lesson as to the utter futility of attempting settlement on the land under the co-operative system'.⁷⁴

From early in the twentieth century, with the growing influence of the Labor Party in Queensland, closer settlement policies moved towards a co-operative model, especially for the marketing of produce.⁷⁵ Queensland properties remained predominantly large-scale pastoral, with most smallholdings located on the urban fringe in order to service town markets. With the election of a Labor government in May 1915, the first to hold a majority in Queensland's Legislative Assembly, policies to expand primary industry and the promotion of closer settlement to increase the rural population were introduced.⁷⁶

South Australia responded to the Depression by establishing thirteen village settlements from 1894 to 1905, including one on Kangaroo Island similar to the New Australia colony in Paraguay.⁷⁷ Receiving financial assistance from the government and advice from a Village Settlement Expert, most were unemployed and inexperienced men, trying to make a living on marginal lands during drought.⁷⁸ Financial costs for these settlements caused public concern, resulting in the 1900

⁷⁴ Metcalf, *op. cit.*, p. 30, quoting Queensland Legislative Assembly Votes & Proceedings, 1895, pp. 1020-1055.

⁷⁵ Cameron, *op. cit.*, p. 06.2.

⁷⁶ *ibid.*, p. 06.8; W.R. Johnson, D.J. Murphy, 'Ryan, Thomas Joseph (Tom) (1876-1921)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol. 11, Melbourne University Press, 1988, pp. 496- 500; www.qld.alp.org.au, accessed 1 March 2011, states Premier Ryan's Labor Government instituted a 'radical and extensive reform program' when they came to office.

⁷⁷ *Brisbane Courier*, 26 Jan 1894, p. 7; D. Gobbett, *op. cit.*, p. 54 states that the settlement at Murtho established the Co-operative Settlement Association of Australasia expecting expansion across Australia and beyond of village settlements.

⁷⁸ Metcalf, *op. cit.*, pp. 22-24; Williams, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

Royal Commission into the Renmark and Murray Settlements.⁷⁹ Once again it was found that village settlements were a failure.⁸⁰ Begun ‘with a great flourish of trumpets’, the confidence of success did not last.⁸¹ Village settlements were encouraged by Premier Charles Kingston, a radical, populist leader whose reforms included the extension of the vote to women in 1895.⁸² Describing Kingston’s vision to help the unemployed, a newspaper declared he

entertained the idea of establishing a number of prosperous village communes, where the people could live in ‘equality and fraternity’ and share the proceeds of their toil. A beautiful idea, no doubt, in theory, but somehow or other it generally falls to pieces when put into practice.⁸³

Similar to the mainland colonies, Tasmania also experienced a severe unemployment crisis in the 1890s.⁸⁴ However, although plans to institute village settlements for the unemployed were initiated, parliamentary support wavered.⁸⁵ After several years of deliberations, land was finally selected in the Huon district between Hastings and Southport, sixty miles south of Hobart for a village settlement.⁸⁶ A small settlement of ten families with an experienced manager was established, but it too failed within a

⁷⁹ *ibid.*, p. 25.

⁸⁰ *The Examiner* (Launceston, Tasmania), 31 August 1900, p. 4. The article decried the rosy-hued idealism that led to the South Australian village settlements, saying proponents believed ‘there would be no more starving workmen, for all could go on the land to labour side by side on communistic principles, and convert what had hitherto been wilderness into an area flowing with milk and honey’.

⁸¹ *ibid.* The article concluded that ‘the experience of South Australia in village settlement has been dearly purchased, certainly, but it should serve as an object lesson to other communities, inasmuch as many of the rocks to be avoided are very clearly shown’.

⁸² www.parliament.sa.gov.au; www.womenshistory.com.au/timeline.asp, accessed 25 January 2011.

⁸³ *The Examiner*, 31 August 1900, p. 4.

⁸⁴ *The Mercury*, 2 December 1893, p. 1. The report said that 500 to 600 men around Hobart had no hope of any employment; *South Australian Register* (Adelaide) reported more than 400 men were out of work in Launceston the previous year, 20 December 1892, p. 5; In 1892 demonstrators in Tasmania demanded that large landholdings should be broken up to enable unemployed men to go on the land, but the Minister for Lands refused to consider this, saying that the current Depression was not a Government responsibility, *South Australian Register*, 29 September 1892, p. 6.

⁸⁵ See, for example, *The Mercury*, 8 December 1892, p. 4 reported discussion in the House of Assembly that village settlements providing work, not charity, were needed; *The Mercury*, 2 November 1893, p. 4 announced a government scheme; *The Mercury*, 2 March 1894, p. 3 reported Parliament was not keen on village settlements; *The Mercury*, 27 August 1894, p. 2 said the government would subsidise village settlements.

⁸⁶ *The Mercury*, 4 October 1894, p. 4.

few years.⁸⁷ In the west of the continent a West Australian Village Settlement Co-operative Association was formed during 1893, and a village settlement of ten families established at Harvey, thirty miles from Bunbury, but little is known about its success or failure.⁸⁸ This small venture would however, hardly have impacted on the unemployment crisis in that part of Australia. A reflection of the community interest in group settlements was a proposed commercial enterprise in Western Australia during the same period, 'The Esperanza Co-operative Commonwealth', although it was not planned for unemployed men.⁸⁹ Another co-operative community to contain 200 married couples, fifty single men and fifty single women on 100,000 acres 'somewhere' in Western Australia, was scoffed at by one newspaper, who wrote 'Western Australia is better fitted than many new countries for settlement, but she is certainly not more suitable than others for rash experiments in the founding of Utopia'.⁹⁰

The New South Wales experience

By the 1850s in the largest colony of New South Wales, available agricultural land close to the major coastal settlement of Sydney was at a premium, and large areas of the remainder of the state were occupied by pastoralists under favourable leasing conditions. As a result, from 1861 New South Wales enacted legislation with the *Robertson Land Acts* to encourage the establishment of small freehold farms. The

⁸⁷ *ibid.*, 20 April 1895, p. 2; A. Reynolds, 'Dobson, Emily (1842-1934)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol. 8, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1981, pp. 310-311. Emily Dobson was the President and Secretary of the Village Settlement Committee. Reynolds states the settlement failed by 1898.

⁸⁸ *The Western Mail* (Perth), 15 July 1893, p. 29; *The West Australian*, 4 August 1893, p. 3. The property was approximately 500 acres.

⁸⁹ *The West Australian*, 15 October 1891, p. 4. Shares were offered in this 'Co-operative Commonwealth' for £25 each; There was speculation that the group was negotiating to buy land near the South Australian border at Eucla, *South Australian Register*, 5 October 1891, p. 4.

⁹⁰ *The Western Mail*, 29 April 1893, p. 17.

intent of this legislation was to simplify land settlement by creating smaller farming properties, thereby restricting the property size and power of pastoralists.⁹¹ Although the general consensus is that the legislation proved unsuccessful, some historians now argue that the *Alienation Act* was responsible for significant changes in the farming industry.⁹² An understanding of land selection legislation in New South Wales is at best difficult, or as Gammage has succinctly stated, ‘the awesome volume of clauses, regulations and court cases, the hidden iceberg of legal and illegal evasion and subterfuge, and the trackless maze of local and executive decision have deterred all but the bravest’.⁹³

From 1855, the New South Wales government was given complete power by the Colonial Office to formulate and implement land policies.⁹⁴ Closer settlement became part of state governments’ strategies to encourage immigrants from the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth after 1900. Victoria advertised itself to prospective migrants as ‘the irrigation state’, whilst South Australia portrayed itself as ‘the state for outdoor life, crises-proof and promising’.⁹⁵ Closer settlement legislation aimed to create reasonable-sized properties capable of providing a livelihood, and better rail and road infrastructure for access to markets.⁹⁶ From the late 1880s in New South Wales, responding to the population’s changing needs and demands, land laws were

⁹¹ M. E. Robinson, ‘The Robertson Land Acts in New South Wales, 1861-84’, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, No. 61, March 1974, pp. 17-19.

⁹² *ibid.*, p. 18.

⁹³ B. Gammage, ‘Who Gained, & who was meant to gain, from land selection in New South Wales?’, *Australian Historical Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 94, April 1990, p. 104; see also J. Oppenheimer, ‘Land Administration in New South Wales to 1855’, M.A. (Hons) Thesis, University of New England, 1978.

⁹⁴ Prior to this date legislation could be over-ruled by the Colonial Office. A. G. Lang, *Crown Land in New South Wales*, Butterworths, Sydney, 1973, p. 8.

⁹⁵ T. Connors, ‘Closer Settlement Schemes’, *The Australian Quarterly*, Vol. 42, No. 1, 1970, p. 75.

⁹⁶ C. J. King, *An Outline of Closer Settlement in New South Wales. Part 1. The Sequence of the Land Laws 1788-1956*, Department of Agriculture, New South Wales, 1957, p. 187.

constantly revised and amended in almost every parliamentary session, ‘till seventy times seven’.⁹⁷

Another conditioning factor in land use were changes in technology from the second half of the nineteenth century, with both the mechanical age and advances in science improving agricultural production. These innovations made intensive land use and smaller property sizes a feasible alternative to large selections.⁹⁸ Land previously deemed unproductive could become arable with the use of fertilisers. Transporting primary produce to market became more reliable with the extension of railway lines and road systems, whilst refrigeration increased the life of agricultural products, broadening market opportunities.⁹⁹ The extension of the railway network became important in later plans for developing areas for soldier settlement in country areas of New South Wales. By the turn of the twentieth century there was a prevailing view that country life could sustain the urban poor. Although the majority of the population was urban-based, the myth of the bushman heralded by writers like Henry Lawson and Banjo Patterson became very popular. Despite the work of charities like the Benevolent Society and St Vincent de Paul, unemployment and underemployment were a constant worry for many workers. Most at risk were poorly paid unskilled labourers, as work was often intermittent, physically demanding and dangerous.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ *ibid.*, p. 187. The reference ‘till seventy times seven’ is biblical, from the Gospel of Matthew, Chapter 18, Verse 22 from the 1769 Oxford King James Bible, www.kingjamesbibleonline.org, accessed 4 July 2011; A.G. Lang, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

⁹⁸ M. Keneley, ‘Closer settlement in the Western District of Victoria: a case study in Australian land use policy, 1898-1914’, *Journal of Historical Geography*, Vol. 28, No. 3, 2002, p. 365.

⁹⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ A. O’Brien, *Poverty’s Prison. The Poor in New South Wales 1880-1918*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1988, p. 65, p. 70.

From 1879, protests and deputations by the unemployed placed political pressure on the Premier and the government to address the situation. In 1880, Premier Henry Parkes in an attempt to relieve the crisis, offered men free rail passes to seek work in the country. His plan was not well accepted by rural authorities who believed the unemployed masses would present a hazard to the social and political morés of farming communities.¹⁰¹ A Labour Bureau, opened in Sydney in 1892, registered thirteen per cent of the city's workforce required assistance by the end of that year.¹⁰² For the first time city workers became part of the long-term unemployed in addition to country labourers whose work was usually seasonal. The government's proposed remedy was 'the transfer of the unused labour to the unused or under-used land'.¹⁰³ Politicians became convinced of the advantages of establishing village settlements for two major reasons. Families living in small rural communities would become self-sufficient by growing their own food, and the potential for protests by unemployed men would be reduced.¹⁰⁴ During the 1890s depression, land was used as a 'cushion' against continuing unemployment.¹⁰⁵ There was also a strong belief that rural re-settlement would succeed, as 'any man who likes to can adapt himself to agriculture ... it is the natural occupation of man'.¹⁰⁶

New South Wales also followed the village settlement dream experienced in other parts of Australia. In 1893, the *New South Wales Labour Settlements Act* incorporated

¹⁰¹ *ibid.*, p. 20, pp. 65-74.

¹⁰² *ibid.*, p. 70, p. 74. This figure would have been considerably higher if it included casual and seasonal men also seeking employment.

¹⁰³ M. Williams, 'More and Smaller is Better: Australian Rural Settlement 1788-1914' in J.M. Powell, M. Williams (eds), *Australian Space Australian Time. Geographical Perspectives*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1975, p. 82.

¹⁰⁴ Connors, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

¹⁰⁵ *ibid.*, p. 74.

¹⁰⁶ J.M. Powell, 'Arcadia and Back: "Village Settlement" in Victoria, 1894-1913', *Australian Geographical Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 2, 1973, p. 139.

recommendations made by a previous Select Committee inquiry into the Labour Bureau, with the act having similar objectives to Victoria's legislation.¹⁰⁷ However, only three group settlements for the unemployed were established under this act. Small settlements were begun at Wilberforce, five miles from Windsor, and Bega on the far south coast, but both failed within a short period. Community interest in the progress of these settlements remained high as indicated by continuing reports in contemporary newspapers. In October 1894, for example, *The Sydney Morning Herald* reported that the settlement at Bega was a complete failure. It also noted that settlers at Wilberforce had decided to abandon the co-operative principle and chosen to work individually.¹⁰⁸

The largest settlement, at Pitt Town near Windsor, about forty miles from Sydney and approximately 2,000 acres in size, had a population of 500, made up of 100 families.¹⁰⁹ Several members of the Board of Control of this settlement, including Chris Watson, were advocates of co-operative communities. As Chairman of the Trades and Labour Council, Watson had previously given evidence about co-operatives to a parliamentary enquiry.¹¹⁰ By late 1894, only eighteen months after establishment, settlement members had planted 1,800 fruit trees and nearly 20,000 grape vines, with more land cleared and fenced in preparation for other crops. More than 100 homes had been built, in addition to a sawmill and a dairy.¹¹¹ Not everyone

¹⁰⁷ Fitzpatrick, *op. cit.*, p. 373.

¹⁰⁸ *SMH*, 20 October 1894, p. 4 ; 30 October 1894, p. 5.

¹⁰⁹ Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 351.

¹¹⁰ R.B. Walker, 'The Ambiguous Experiment: Agricultural Co-operatives in New South Wales, 1893-1896', *Labour History*, No. 18, May 1970, pp. 19-22. The Board of Control decided Pitt Town would operate co-operatively, with men expected to work forty-eight hours a week.

¹¹¹ Metcalf, *op. cit.*, pp. 25-26.

was optimistic of good prospects for Pitt Town settlement, as the combination of inexperience and overbearing rules for settlers soon spelt dissent and disaster.¹¹²

Parliamentary debate in late 1894 revealed that the settlement was failing, although Labor members continued to urge the government to encourage labour settlements for men with farming experience.¹¹³ When Pitt Town's Board of Control resigned later that year, Chairman Benjamin Backhouse revealed that the 'bond of unity' settlers had initially happily worked under was the bond of poverty. He said settlers had lost faith in the co-operative model, with the result that the settlement was proving a failure.¹¹⁴ Several months later, Backhouse affirmed former board members still believed in the ideals of this type of settlement, but had decided success would only occur when men had a common tie or situation to bind them together.¹¹⁵ These comments are very relevant for the later promotion of group settlements for returned soldiers.

During the debate for amendments to the *Labour Settlements Bill* in the Legislative Council, Sir Julian Salomens argued money should be provided to Pitt Town settlement to allow its survival, saying 'if the settlements turned out a failure, a lesson would have been taught which would not be lost upon either House of Parliament'.¹¹⁶ Eighteen months later Pitt Town failed with only seven settlers still in residence.¹¹⁷ In

¹¹² Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 353 citing *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 October 1894, p. 8, p. 13; Roberts notes there was a saying in the settlement of 'one nail, one slab, one day', p. 352; *The Advertiser* (Adelaide), 20 October 1894, p. 5, reported a deputation to the Minister for Lands said many men on the settlement were unfit to work.

¹¹³ New South Wales Parliamentary Debates, Vol. 72, 12 September 1894, pp. 403-405.

¹¹⁴ *SMH*, 24 November 1894, p. 9.

¹¹⁵ *SMH*, 22 February 1895, p. 5.

¹¹⁶ *SMH*, 2 November 1894, p. 3.

¹¹⁷ Metcalf, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

1909, Government Statistician John Trivett declared village settlements had been a failure in this state.¹¹⁸ Less than ten years later in New South Wales, under a Labor government, village settlements under the name ‘group settlements’ would be strongly promoted as one of the tenures for ex-servicemen under its soldier settlement scheme.

Several land legislation acts, passed by the New South Wales government from the 1890s to the end of World War I, aimed to break up large pastoral companies and encourage closer settlement.¹¹⁹ Renewed interest in farming, combined with good seasons, resulted in the expansion of country towns such as Wagga, Tamworth and Inverell in the early 1900s.¹²⁰ Land acts were however complicated by government paperwork, resulting in only three estates being voluntarily acquired under the *Closer Settlement Act* in three years.¹²¹ In 1908, the definition of a ‘home maintenance area’ was introduced to make future land subdivisions large enough to support a family.¹²²

In 1905, New South Wales began plans to establish irrigation farms under closer settlement. Land acquisition started in 1911 and two years later small farms of between two and fifty acres became available at Yanco, near Leeton on the Murrumbidgee River in the central west of the state. Homes costing £255 were built on each block and the government allowed prospective farmers to borrow extra monies for stock and equipment. Lucerne crop returns were confidently predicted to

¹¹⁸ Fitzpatrick, *op. cit.*, p. 373.

¹¹⁹ King, *op. cit.*, p. 133; Haswell, *op. cit.*, p. 3; Connors, *op. cit.*, p. 76 says a response to these Acts was the formation of the influential graziers’ lobby group, The Farmers’ and Settlers’ Association.

¹²⁰ King, *op. cit.*, p. 189.

¹²¹ Haswell, *op. cit.*, pp. 6-7; King, *op. cit.*, p. 253.

¹²² Connors, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

be six tons an acre, but realised less than one ton per acre. Within a short time, repayments had to be suspended to allow farmers to survive. A 1916 Royal Commission found farm sizes at Yanco were too small for sustainability, recommending they be increased to between 150 and 200 acres.¹²³ This costly experiment in irrigation farms under closer settlement highlighted the shortcomings of government land policy. It was nearly ten years from initial planning until the first farmers received their blocks, although 'planning' is clearly a misnomer in this case. It quickly became apparent farm sizes were too small and predicted crop returns unrealistically high. Additionally, the cost of infrastructure for the project would never be recouped by the government.

Yet in spite of closer settlement debacles as at Yanco, demand for land in New South Wales far outstripped supply, as evidenced by a newspaper report in 1911,

I have been balloting for land now for 22 years. I have travelled thousands of miles to attend ballots; I have before today seen 1500 applicants for one block of land. Thousands of land seekers have given up the quest in disgust, as land ballots, they find, are mainly rich feeding grounds for land agents.¹²⁴

In New South Wales acquiring farming land was difficult, if not impossible for many men. Seen as the conservative backbone of the community and the economy, farming was an ideal most men could never realise. Conversely, concerns about the drift to the city of young people from farming communities worried politicians about the nation's health, economically and socially.¹²⁵ A Labor government, elected for the first time in

¹²³ B. R. Davidson, *European Farming in Australia*, Elsevier Publishing Co., Amsterdam, 1981, pp. 168-170.

¹²⁴ *SMH*, 18 July 1911, p. 6; Haswell, *op. cit.*, p. 12 states Liberal Premier Wade said between 1904 and 1910, more than 1,000 new farming properties had been created through government acquisition.

¹²⁵ K.L. Fry, *Soldier Settlement and the Australian Agrarian Myth after the First World War*, Australian National University Press, Canberra, 1973, pp. 32-33 quoting *Victorian Government Select*

1910 in New South Wales, was given a mandate by the citizens to introduce reforming policies to better the life of workers.¹²⁶

Watson and Holman – key architects of group soldier settlement in New South Wales

Late nineteenth century land legislation in Australia reflected not only the hopes of a young nation, but later contributed to changes in social and political attitudes.¹²⁷ The depressed economic conditions and major unemployment of the 1890s were critical to the development of closer settlement land policies across Australia and also to the emergence of the Labor movement in Australia.¹²⁸ Two Labor politicians, already mentioned in this thesis, Chris Watson and William Holman, were interested and involved in village or labour settlements in New South Wales in the 1890s, and also in later soldier settlement policies. It is argued in this study that both Watson and Holman were influential and key protagonists in promoting these policies.



The Honourable John Christian (Chris) Watson
Source: National Library of Australia



William Holman, New South Wales Premier
Source: State Library of New South Wales

Committee upon the Cause of the Drift of Population from Country Districts to the City Report 1919, Vi. p. 644.

¹²⁶ www.dpc.gov.au, accessed 5 May 2011. The first Labor Government in New South Wales took office on 21 October 1910, under Premier James McGowan.

¹²⁷ J.M. Powell, 'Utopia, millenium and the co-operative ideal: a behavioural matrix in the settlement process', *Australian Geographer*, Vol. 11, No. 6, 1971, p. 627.

¹²⁸ V.G. Childe, *How Labour Governs. A Study of Workers' Representation in Australia*, Melbourne University Press, London, 1964, p. 7.

As noted earlier, Chris Watson was a member of the board of Pitt Town Settlement, as well as sitting on the parliamentary Select Committee that investigated its demise.¹²⁹ Watson actively supported co-operative village settlements for the unemployed.¹³⁰ Both Watson and Holman began their political careers in the New South Wales legislature during the 1890s depression when this type of settlement was established. Former contemporaries in the Trades and Labour Council of Sydney, considered to be a forum for innovative social and political reform, both men later represented country electorates as Labor parliamentarians.¹³¹ The Labour Electoral League formed in 1891 by the New South Wales Trades and Labor Council sought parliamentary reform to improve working and social conditions and change existing land laws.¹³² William Holman was elected to the seat of Grenfell in July 1898, and later was the member for Cootamundra until 1920. Holman served in the first Labor government elected in New South Wales, becoming Premier in June 1913.¹³³ Chris Watson was the member for Young in southern New South Wales in the Legislative Assembly from 1894 until entering federal politics in the first Commonwealth parliament in 1901. His political career was also bright, becoming the world's first Labor Prime Minister in April 1904, although his tenure was a brief four months.¹³⁴

From the beginning of the twentieth century, with significant numbers of men out of work and rising living costs, union members and labor supporters continued to see

¹²⁹ *SMH*, 7 October 1896, p. 6.

¹³⁰ *The Barrier Miner* (Broken Hill), 10 December 1891, p. 3; 23 May 1893, p. 2.

¹³¹ N.B. Nairn, 'Some Aspects of the Social Role of the Labour Movement in New South Wales in the 1870s', *Labour History*, No. 16, May 1969, p. 3.

¹³² www.parliament.nsw.gov.au, accessed 4 January 2010.

¹³³ N.B. Nairn, 'Holman, William Arthur (1871-1934)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol. 9, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1983, pp. 340-347.

¹³⁴ N.B. Nairn, 'Watson, John Christian (Chris) (1867-1941)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol. 12, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1990, pp. 400-405; <http://primeministers.naa.gov.au>, accessed 4 January 2010; www.parliament.nsw.gov.au, *op. cit.*; Holman served as Attorney-General in McGowan's ministry from October 1910, www.dpc.gov.au, *op. cit.*

closer settlement as a way to relieve unemployment.¹³⁵ This is reflected in Holman's policies developed before the beginning of World War I in which he favoured more closer settlement by breaking up some of the large estates and/or preventing their expansion.¹³⁶ Soon after becoming Premier in mid-1913, Holman promised eleven million acres would be made available for closer settlement during his next term of office.¹³⁷

In the same period, town planning rose to prominence in political and professional circles, influenced by both the formation of a Town Planning Association of New South Wales and a report into housing for workmen in Europe and America.¹³⁸ John Daniel (Jack) Fitzgerald, a foundation member and Vice-President of the new association, had strong links with Chris Watson and William Holman.¹³⁹ Both Watson and Fitzgerald had been members of the Typographical Association of New South Wales, honing their debating skills, intent on social and political reform, before becoming involved in the Trades and Labour Council.¹⁴⁰ As Minister for Local Government under Holman, Fitzgerald was closely involved with the planning and construction of Daceyville, a garden suburb for workers in Sydney's eastern

¹³⁵ I. Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics, The dynamics of the labour movement in eastern Australia 1900-1921*, Hale & Iremonger, Sydney, 1979, p. 33; p. 47 quoting the Report from the 1902 Commonwealth Trade Union Congress.

¹³⁶ H.V. Evatt, *William Holman. Australian Labour Leader*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1979, p. 173.

¹³⁷ J. Hagan & K. Turner, *A History of the Labor Party in New South Wales 1891-1991*, Longman Cheshire, Melbourne, 1991, p. 100; www.parliament.nsw.gov.au, *op. cit.*; W.A. Holman, *The State's Duty to the Soldier. Proposals of the New South Wales Government. Memorandum by the Premier*, W.A. Gullick, Government Printer, Sydney, 18 May 1916. Holman proposed additional government measures to look after men partially or fully incapacitated by the war.

¹³⁸ P. Ashton, *The Accidental City. Planning Sydney Since 1788*, Southwood Press Pty Ltd, Sydney, 1993, p. 42; C. Garnaut, 'Towards metropolitan organisation: town planning and the garden city idea' in S. Hamnett and R. Freestone (eds), *The Australian Metropolis. A Planning History*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 2000, p. 51; L. Sandercock, *Property, Politics, and Urban Planning. A history of Australian City Planning, 1890-1990*, Second Edition, Transaction Publishers, New Brunswick, 1990, p. 61 states that Holman was responsible for commissioning this report in 1912.

¹³⁹ B. Nairn, 'Fitzgerald, John Daniel (Jack) (1862-1922)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol. 8, Melbourne University Press, 1981, pp. 513-515.

¹⁴⁰ *ibid*; www.aph.gov.au/exhibitions/pogg/members/watson.htm, accessed 25 April 2011.

suburbs.¹⁴¹ The Chairman of both the 1917 and 1918 Australian Town Planning Conferences, Fitzgerald reported back to cabinet on proceedings, which included papers on Greater Sydney and plans for the rehabilitation of Australian troops.¹⁴²

Premier Holman promised to establish more planned estates like Daceyville in Sydney's east, in both city and country areas, especially as the government was concerned about the urgent need for increased agricultural production and rural workers.¹⁴³ Holman's government planned to build affordable homes for workers, creating model suburbs which had common features with current 'European village housing experiments', in response to the earlier report which had strongly supported establishing garden villages and cities in New South Wales.¹⁴⁴ With the outbreak of war a month after the opening of the new term of parliament, all election promises had to be put on hold in order to address the needs of the war effort.

As Premier during the war years, it was logical for William Holman to consider group settlement based on co-operative lines after New South Wales had agreed to introduce a soldier settlement scheme. This type of tenure would serve several purposes. More men could be quickly settled, giving inexperienced men access to on-site training and assistance, promoting closer settlement and increased agricultural production. The

¹⁴¹ Ashton, *Accidental City*, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

¹⁴² *ibid.*, p. 46, p. 48. The Queensland Government had agreed to host the 1918 Conference if proposals for housing for workers and returned men were included in the program. The Conference included a paper by H.N. Barwell, from the South Australian government, on proposals for soldier settlement in that State.

¹⁴³ *ibid.*, p. 101; *Sydney Mail*, 21 January 1914, p. 27, reporting the findings of the Royal Commission on Food Supply and Prices; *SMH*, 21 June 1916, p. 9, outlined Holman's plans to extend Daceyville and said proposals for similar model villages had been made for Stockton near Newcastle, Bulli near Wollongong, and Broken Hill. Another model village was suggested to replace Calico Town, south of Daceyville.

¹⁴⁴ *SMH*, 1 January 1914, p. 5; Ashton, *The Accidental City*, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

policy would also address the problem of readily-available land as little Crown land was available for resumption in New South Wales. Group settlement was similarly an extension of garden city movement ideals to improve living conditions and provide social reform, policies Labor politician Jack Fitzgerald strongly advocated and Holman supported.

Chris Watson continued to be politically active in New South Wales, supporting Holman's model village plans at Daceyville and encouraging country co-operative enterprises.¹⁴⁵ A long-time believer in the benefits of co-operative village settlement, Watson also encouraged the idea of group settlement for ex-servicemen. Only a few months after handing down his report recommending the country establish a soldier settlement scheme for returned men, Watson was quoted extolling this type of tenure,

We intend to see that as far as possible the returned soldiers are settled in groups on suitable areas, not scattered about as isolated individuals. They will thus be able to assist and co-operate with each other, and be able to obtain advice or information much more easily. From the social point of view, too, of course, some sort of group system will have its advantages.¹⁴⁶

Group settlement may have been an ideal of utopian socialism, but this tenure was a practical solution for the thousands of returned soldiers the state had agreed to settle within a short period after the war. Of the hundreds of men who settled on the six group settlements in this study the vast majority were working men, largely unskilled and with little or no farming experience. Perhaps this socialist ideal appealed to them, or as a Western Australian group settler said many years later, 'it was bush work, and

¹⁴⁵ *SMH*, 7 November 1913, p. 7; 31 January 1914, p. 22. This article reported on the New South Wales Political Conference in Sydney in January 1914. J.C. Watson, as a member of both the Agricultural Committee and the Lands Committee, recommended in their reports the principle of co-operative marketing for fruits and other primary products, and a Royal Commission into prospects for increased share-farming in the State.

¹⁴⁶ *The Mercury* (Hobart), 9 December 1915, p. 4.

it's as near Socialism as you can get in a capitalistic system of society'.¹⁴⁷ It is similarly clear that this type of settlement did not appeal to former officers, as in this study only four officers were identified as living on these settlements.¹⁴⁸

From the mid-1800s, Australian land policies of closer settlement advanced by many state governments had little success. Addressing a specific need during the depression years of the 1890s, many community or village settlements were established across Australia with most failing within a short period. Common factors were that men had little or no farming experience, but had few alternatives for work other than attempt to make a living from small farming blocks. Co-operative practises also failed. Looking back on the problems besetting the Pitt Town Settlement, perhaps Chris Watson took heed of the board Chairman's declaration that for a village settlement to succeed men needed a common background or interest. Whilst labour settlements in the 1890s were intended to address high unemployment caused by a severe depression, governments in New South Wales and South Australia ignored advice to only allow men with previous farming experience on the land. A further contributing factor to failure in many labour settlements was that they were established on poor agricultural land. Both inexperience and poor land feature strongly in reasons why returned men forfeited under soldier settlement schemes across Australia after World War I. In South Australia, even after the failures of soldier settlement, land schemes for the unemployed were introduced in the 1930s. Land remained a panacea, with unemployed men assured this was a practical way to become self-sufficient and regain

¹⁴⁷ G. Bolton, *A Fine Country to Starve In*, University of Western Australia Press, Perth, 1972, p. 33.

¹⁴⁸ See Appendix A.

lost self-respect.¹⁴⁹ Similarities to earlier group soldier settlements can be seen with the 1930s South Australian scheme where Commonwealth funds were made available to build homes and purchase farming equipment. In these dairying and poultry settlements in the Adelaide Hills, farming inexperience contributed to decreased production, resulting in failure by 1934.¹⁵⁰

New South Wales and Victorian investigations into closer settlement at the beginning of the twentieth century produced similar findings, and yet within a short time both states introduced legislation for soldier settlement that would repeat the same mistakes. In August 1918 a member of the Victorian Legislative Council tellingly reminded the government of these findings whilst cautioning against making the same mistakes with the proposed Soldier Settlement Scheme.¹⁵¹

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that the soldier settlement scheme across Australia after World War I was modelled on closer settlement land policies from the nineteenth century. Both the Depression of the 1890s and the growth of a utopian movement influenced responses by both governments and individuals to build a better world and address unemployment and need in the community through co-operative land ventures. It has been shown that these ventures rarely lasted more than a handful of years, because of poor land, inexperienced men and the failure of co-operative methods. Labor politicians, notably Jack Lang, Chris Watson and William Holman,

¹⁴⁹ S.W. Dyer, 'Back to the Land: Settlement Schemes for Adelaide's Unemployed, 1930-35', *Labour History*, No. 31, November 1976, p. 30.

¹⁵⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 32-33.

¹⁵¹ *ibid.*, p. 60 quoting speech by Hon. J. D. Brown in Victorian Legislative Council, 7 August 1918.

all believed in the ideals of co-operative living and encouraged this concept for land settlement for returned men. This chapter has also shown that the policy of garden cities, promoted by the New South Wales government, fitted neatly into Labor Party policies aimed at social reform. It has revealed that these Labor politicians had similar aspirations for group soldier settlement, believing it would be a sound vehicle for returned men.

Chapter Three, 'Implementation', will discuss how agreement was reached on the implementation of an Australia-wide soldier settlement scheme, with particular emphasis on plans developed by the Labor government of New South Wales.

Chapter Three

Implementation

As outlined in the previous chapter, nineteenth century closer settlement schemes in Australia had not produced the expected results. All Australian states had attempted different models, but with little sustained success. Chapter Two also considered the effects of the utopian movement in the 1890s, and how planned co-operative communities like William Lane's 'New Australia' in Paraguay also did not achieve their aims. The chapter argued that New South Wales Labor politicians, Jack Lang, Chris Watson and William Holman, were all strong believers in instituting social reform and promoted the ideals of community or group settlements and garden cities. It showed that Jack Lang had suggested a post-war land settlement scheme for returned men several months before the release of the report, *Returned Soldiers. Employment and Settlement*, by the Federal Parliamentary War Committee under the chairmanship of former Prime Minister, Chris Watson. The chapter concluded that group soldier settlement, the tenure promoted by the incumbent New South Wales Labor government, was not only an ideal of social utopianism promoted by Labor politicians, but a practical solution to settling thousands of men quickly on the land after the war.

It will be shown in this chapter that the concept of a soldier settlement scheme was popular in the community, receiving widespread coverage in contemporary newspapers. Chapter Three will also outline discussions about repatriation and soldier settlements between state and Commonwealth governments at a number of conferences held from early 1916. It will be argued that proposed costings for this

scheme, both by the Commonwealth and the New South Wales governments were greatly under-estimated. This chapter will reveal that rehabilitation plans of soldier settlement for men partially physically or mentally affected by their war experiences were inadequate to assist them return to normal civilian life. Whilst it was argued a scheme to promote smaller agricultural holdings at advantageous repayment conditions for returned men would address employment concerns, increase primary production and provide a solution to the problem of demobilised servicemen creating a public nuisance in the cities, this chapter also addresses concerns about these rehabilitation plans.¹

Even before the Commonwealth plan for a soldier settlement scheme was announced, at least one state initiated a plan for preferential land settlement for returned men. In August 1915, the New South Wales Minister for Lands, William Ashford, revealed that 250,000 acres of land in the Western Division, between Wyalong and Hillston, had been set aside for returned men. His instructions to local land boards were to give preference to returned men applying for any other Crown lands.²

The Argus in Melbourne emphasised the nation's obligation to its soldiers. Articles stressed an Australian land settlement scheme without restrictions must be ready immediately after the war.³ Similarly, *The Sydney Morning Herald* urged prompt government action on promises of land for returned men, noting up to 20,000 men would want land after the war.

¹ M. Lake, *The Limits of Hope. Soldier Settlement in Victoria 1915-38*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1996, p.25; C. Lloyd & J. Rees, *The Last Shilling. A History of Repatriation in Australia*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1994, p. 44.

² *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 August 1915, p. 8.

³ *The Argus*, 27 Jan 1916, p. 6.

This is not a matter that can be dealt with in a desultory, leisurely fashion. We cannot afford to waste time if the community is to keep faith with the men who return from the front. There are numerous indications that a large body of men will return with the definite expectation that they are to be settled on the land under favourable conditions. They are entitled to hold that expectation.⁴

The following month *The Sydney Morning Herald* reported on Commonwealth plans for soldiers' farms and what the New South Wales government might do, saying an agreement was yet to be reached. Lands Minister Ashford announced that 'a few men' had already been assisted to settle on the land, and cabinet had discussed a land scheme for several thousand men. Further, the Minister had 'made it clear to the Cabinet that it would be impracticable to make farms available for disabled soldiers, as he held the view that farming could only be followed by those in the possession of full health and strength. His own idea was to have these particulars (sic) farms not too far from the centres of civilisation'.⁵ These statements in early 1916 reveal Ashford's personal opinion that only physically fit returned men should be eligible for soldier settlement. Whether his opinion changed or public pressure forced a change over the course of the war, returned men in this state were not discriminated against in their application for soldier settlement.

A land settlement scheme for returned Australian soldiers proved popular in the community and was actively pursued by the press. Many believed the scheme would be advantageous for the nation, and fitting recompense for men who had willingly served their country. As one article noted, 'If one effect of the war is to cut away the red tape that has in the past hampered land settlement in this State, we shall receive something in return for the loss of blood and loss of money that it has so far

⁴ *SMH*, 26 January 1916, p. 9.

⁵ *SMH*, 17 February 1916, p. 10.

involved'.⁶ Soldier settlement became, as Rosemary Sparkes succinctly noted, 'a marriage between the individual's dream and the governments' dreams'.⁷

In February 1916, representatives of Commonwealth and state governments and the Federal Parliamentary War Committee met in Melbourne to discuss a nation-wide soldier settlement scheme. At this conference the Federal Parliamentary War Committee's proposal for a soldier settlement scheme was adopted. Agreement was reached that responsibility for land policy and its distribution would remain with individual state governments.⁸ Questionnaires had been distributed to the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) overseas about men's interest in settling on the land post-war. Whilst only a third of the responses had been collated by early 1916, Watson extrapolated that about 40,000 men would apply for land under a soldier settlement scheme.⁹ A press release by Acting Prime Minister Senator Pearce, issued at the end of the conference said they estimated up to 42,000 men could be on the land within three years. This figure was premised on the war ending in 1916 and the Commonwealth being able to raise the money to finance the scheme.¹⁰ Resolutions agreed to at this conference included the immediate establishment of state training farms and selection criteria ranking applicants as eligible immediately, eligible after training, or not suitable. Another resolution approved enlisted men who had not

⁶ *SMH*, 21 February 1916. p. 8.

⁷ R. Sparkes, '“Forty Acres and a Crow.” A Comparison of Soldier Settlement in Australia After the Two World Wars', M.A. (Hons) Thesis, University of New England, 1996, p. 28.

⁸ Commonwealth Parliamentary Papers, Vol. V, Session 1914-15-16-17, *Report of the Resolutions, Proceedings, and Debates of the Conference of Representatives of the Commonwealth and State Governments and the Federal Parliamentary War Committee (together with Appendices) in respect of the Settlement of Returned Soldiers on the Land, &c held at Melbourne 17th- 19th February 1916*, pp. 1457-1516.

⁹ E. Scott, *The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918. Vol. XI: Australia During the War*. 7th edn, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1941, p. 843.

¹⁰ *The Argus*, 21 February 1916, p. 6, 'Returned Soldiers. Settlement on Land. Scheme Adopted'; The Report ... in respect of the Settlement of Returned Soldiers on the Land, *op. cit.*, p. 1468, records that Watson believed of an estimated 60,000 who would indicate their desire to go on the land, this figure could be expected to drop by twenty-five per cent.

served at the front to also be eligible for soldier settlement.¹¹ Senator Pearce appeared confident of the value of the scheme, stating

I think that the scheme will prove an eminently practical one and be extremely beneficial to the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth will be the guiding body in putting the scheme into effect, and the States will consult it on any steps they propose to take.¹²

The report by Messrs Watson and Gilbert stressed that the states were better equipped than the Commonwealth to implement this policy as ‘making advances to the settlers should be left to the States, which have both the experience and the machinery necessary for the success of the undertaking, and some of which possess land of their own’.¹³ Some continuing confusion among various states as to their responsibility to locate and organise land for the scheme remained, a fact reiterated in the Federal Treasurer’s memo of 1917.¹⁴

Whilst initial estimates for the cost of the scheme were between £10 million and £20 million, the Commonwealth was concerned the amount would increase, thus adding to the country’s already substantial war debt. All state governments agreed any

¹¹ Report on ... the Settlement of Returned Soldiers on the Land, *op. cit.*, pp. 1461-1462.

¹² *The Argus*, 21 February 1916, p. 6; *SMH*, 21 February 1916, p. 10. The press release was reported across the country, see for example, *The Examiner* (Launceston), 21 February 1916, p. 6; *The Advertiser* (Adelaide), 21 February 1916, p. 6; *The West Australian* (Perth), 21 February 1916, p. 8.

¹³ Scott, *op. cit.*, p. 842 quoting Commonwealth Parliamentary Papers 1914-15, Paper No. 299 (no page ref); David Gilbert had been associated with Watson when he was editor of the Labor newspaper, *The World*, from mid-1914. As Secretary of the New South Wales State War Council, Gilbert had assisted Watson in drafting the report recommending a policy of soldier settlement for Australian troops. Gilbert was Secretary of the Board of Trustees for the Australian Soldiers’ Repatriation Fund, established in 1916 and worked in the Commonwealth Repatriation Department from its inception, becoming Comptroller from June 1918 till June 1920, *ibid.*, p. 829, p. 830; A.G. Smith, ‘Gilbert, David John (1873-1950)’, *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol. 9, Melbourne University Press, 1983, pp. 2-3.

¹⁴ Memo dated 3 September 1917 recommending a clear statement of the States’ responsibility for providing lands should be added to correspondence from the 1916 Premiers’ Conference. National Archives of Australia: Repatriation Department, A2479, *Correspondence file, annual single number series, 1916-1918*, 17/997, Land Settlement – Resolutions of Premiers Conference of January 1917 re Soldier Settlement.

repatriation expenditure must be a Commonwealth responsibility.¹⁵ The insistence on Commonwealth responsibility was in part due to state concerns about the scheme's viability and the impact financial losses would have on their economies. Recognising many men would have little or no capital to equip a property, delegates agreed to make advances to a maximum of £500 per settler for purchasing stock and feed, over and above the cost of the land.¹⁶ New South Wales and Victorian representatives noted their governments expected losses, and Queensland's treasurer, Edward Theodore, said he believed many men would return with war-related disabilities that prevented them undertaking physical farm work.¹⁷ Agreeing with Theodore's rationale, this thesis argues that the war-related physical and psychological injuries of soldier settlers on the group soldier settlements in the County of Cumberland, the greater Sydney area, impacted on their ability to work their farms. Repatriation conferences never discussed assistance plans for partially-disabled men who could not return to their pre-war occupations. These returned men represented a group whose needs were never adequately addressed by authorities in the aftermath of the war.

New South Wales Premier Holman believed the 1916 conference created, rather than resolved problems for the states. He said that 'the position is exceedingly difficult, and exceedingly unsatisfactory... the responsibility is now thrown on the State Governments of formulating their own schemes'.¹⁸ Holman's statements may explain

¹⁵ Scott, *op. cit.*, pp. 842-843; D.I. McDonald, 'The Australian Soldiers' Repatriation Fund. An Experiment in Social Legislation', in J. Roe (ed), *Social Policy in Australia: Some Perspectives 1901-1975*, Cassell Australia, Sydney, 1976, p. 118.

¹⁶ New South Wales Parliamentary Debates, Vol. 62, p. 5488, 20 March 1916. Minister for Lands, Ashford, during debate on the second reading of the Returned Soldiers' Settlement Bill explaining the agreement reached between states and Commonwealth. Ashford noted New South Wales estimated it could put 4,000 men on the land within the next two years at a cost of £2 million, adding that on condition that the states agreed to a soldier settlement scheme, the Commonwealth agreed to be responsible for borrowing the funds.

¹⁷ Lloyd & Rees, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

¹⁸ *The Argus*, 22 February 1916, p. 7.

the simplicity of legislation introduced into the New South Wales parliament the next month. Introducing the legislation in March 1916, the Minister for Lands said it would simply allow land to be set aside for returned servicemen and to finance these actions. Only eighteen months after the beginning of the war, the state government estimated 4,000 men could be on the land within two years at a cost of £2 million. Minister Ashford indicated his government felt it would have discharged its obligations if it could settle returned men who were both physically able and had previous farming knowledge.¹⁹ Although agreement had been reached between all states and the Commonwealth that men would be ranked into three groups, Minister Ashford's comments only considered fit men with farming experience. Under the Act soldier settlement land could be sold or leased to returned men who furnished a Qualification Certificate which stated their eligibility. Returned men could apply for any available land, and local land boards would make the final decision on who received blocks.²⁰ It appears the New South Wales legislation had a loop-hole that did not differentiate between fit and unfit men applying for land, and final decisions were left to local boards.

At the Adelaide Premiers' Conference in May 1916, there was little discussion on the soldier settlement scheme as Commonwealth loans to fund the project had not been finalised. At this conference, Premier Holman said he believed his state would only be able to provide farms for 5,000 men.²¹ With little available Crown land suitable for agriculture, and prior to an administration or policies for soldier settlement, Holman did not want to over-commit his state's economy.

¹⁹ NSWPD, *op. cit.*, Vol. 62, 20 March 1916, p. 5487.

²⁰ L.J. Pryor, 'The Origins of Australia's Repatriation Policy 1914-1920', M.A. Thesis, University of Melbourne, 1932, p. 191.

²¹ Lloyd & Rees, *op. cit.*, pp. 52-53.

In July 1916, a secret memo from Governor-General, Sir Ronald Munro-Ferguson, discussed the possibility of borrowing money in London for the 'Settlement Fund'. The memo briefly outlined the interest and capability of Australian states to implement soldier settlement. Whilst no mention was made of the possibility of British ex-servicemen becoming soldier settlers in Australia, Munro-Ferguson pointedly noted that 'Mr Holman, the Premier, who humours every whim of the urban proletariat, remains the one political leader who discountenances immigration'.²² These comments indicate that the New South Wales Premier was not in favour of British ex-servicemen being welcomed under its soldier settlement scheme. Holman's Labor Party strongly supported the working class, who made up the bulk of soldiers in the AIF. The state government believed their finances and resources would be stretched just to settle Australian returned men on the land.

In January 1917, the Commonwealth government made up to £2 million available for soldier settlement across Australia for the year. Each state was allocated a maximum amount, with the New South Wales portion being £500,000.²³ In April 1917, at an interstate conference of farmers' organisations, concerns were raised about inferior quality land being purchased by state governments for soldier settlement. Chairman Arthur Trethowan, President of the New South Wales Farmers and Settlers Association, noted that in his state 'the Government was busy buying up land that the best farmers had failed to make productive.' A delegate from Western Australia told a

²² NAA: Governor General; A11803, *Governor General's correspondence relating to the war of 1914-1918 [War Files], 1 January 1914 – 31 December 1919*; 1914/89/348. Land Settlement in Australia. 19 July 1916. Secret memo from Governor-General, Sir Ronald Munro-Ferguson to the Secretary of State for the Colonies.

²³ NAA: A2479, *op. cit.*, 17/997, Land Settlement – Resolution of Premiers Conference of January 1917 re Soldier Settlement.

similar story, remarking that many soldier settlers 'would live to damn the country that ever sent them to the war'.²⁴ With little Crown land available, purchasing suitable private lands was expensive, and it is clear from comments made at the conference that many members of this association believed the proposed scheme already presented major problems.

In April 1917, Senator Edward Millen became the Minister in charge of organising the repatriation of Australian forces.²⁵ *The Australian Soldiers' Repatriation Bill*, given royal assent in September 1917, provided the framework for establishing a Repatriation Department to assist war veterans, their dependents and widows.²⁶ This department became operational in April 1918, taking over the role previously performed by State War Councils. The Repatriation Department's responsibilities included providing benefits and assistance to ex-servicemen, such as sustenance, medical treatment, emergency financial grants and war service homes.²⁷

The Soldier Settlement Board of Australia met in Melbourne in early July 1917. Queensland was not represented at this conference. The Queensland Minister for Lands, Mr Hunter, said his state refused to be involved in an Australian land settlement board or be part of a federal scheme, believing both violated states' sovereignty.²⁸ At this meeting soldier settlers' welfare and the administration of advances received protracted discussion. Chairman Senator Millen discussed

²⁴ *The Argus*, 23 April 1917, p. 5 'Farmers' Conference. Condemn Repatriation Methods. Poor Land for Soldiers'; Arthur Trethowan served as a Member of the Legislative Council in New South Wales from 1916 to 1937. He founded the Farmers and Graziers Co-operative Grain, Insurance & Agency Co. Ltd, was Chairman of the newspaper *The Land* and a founder of the Country Party, D. Morrissey, 'Trethowan, Sir Arthur King (1863-1937)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol. 12, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1990, pp. 260-261.

²⁵ Scott, *op. cit.*, p. 832.

²⁶ Pryor, *op. cit.*, p. 97.

²⁷ Scott, *op. cit.*, p. 836; Lloyd and Rees, *op. cit.*, pp. 79-85.

²⁸ *The Argus*, 5 July 1917, p. 4 'Land for Soldiers. Queensland's Position'.

establishing new rural industries, noting he hoped all states would give special consideration to developing smallholdings, mentioning pig farming as a worthwhile example.²⁹ Senator Millen's comments in regard to smallholdings for soldier settlement farms appear to have been more focused on financial costs than the needs of returned men. *The Sydney Morning Herald* later reported Senator Millen as saying that the meeting had 'helped to clearly apportion and define the responsibility of the Commonwealth and the states in relation to the question of soldier settlement generally'.³⁰ When Senator Millen addressed the House on the soldier settlement scheme some weeks later, the response was far from positive as less than a dozen senators were present. Newspapers commented that 'the state of the House seemed to bode ill for a scheme of such importance which attracted so little attention'.³¹ As outlined in Chapter Two, the record of state-assisted land schemes in Australia over the previous hundred years could hardly be termed a triumph. Estimates of the cost for the new scheme had increased to £60 million, and thoughts that the scheme was 'too vast [and] too complicated' added to concerns about its success.³²

A key issue of repatriation discussions was what to do with disabled soldiers. Commonwealth and state representatives made attempts to address these problems, aware men were returning to Australia with disabilities that impacted on their quality of life and earning capacity, but little action was implemented. At the January 1917 Premiers' Conference, one recommendation made to the Prime Minister was that men

²⁹ NAA: Repatriation Department; A2487 (A2487/1), *Correspondence files, annual single number series, 1918-1929*; 1919/5033, Land Settlement Schemes – miscellaneous.

³⁰ *SMH*, 4 July 1917, p. 12.

³¹ *The Argus*, 20 July 1917, p. 6. The newspaper report does not mention the Australian Soldiers' Repatriation Bill, but Millen's speech is related to the Bill and the creation of a Repatriation Commission.

³² *ibid.*

were not to be discharged until they were fit enough to work.³³ This was an impractical suggestion that gave little thought to men's personal wishes to return to civilian life as soon as possible after spending several years away from their loved ones. The proposal not to discharge men quickly could have been a response to the large numbers of men idling in cities, already a cause for concern for authorities who believed it had an adverse effect on recruitment.³⁴ *The Argus* reported Senator Millen favoured the establishment of village settlements and special workshops across Australia to accommodate men whose war disabilities prevented them returning to their pre-war occupations.³⁵ However no action was taken on this recommendation for village settlements for disabled soldiers. Similarly, the Victorian government included an item in the agenda for the October 1918 Soldier Settlement Board Conference on providing small blocks of land for disabled men. The premise was disabled men could raise poultry, pigs or grow fruits to supplement their pension. An integral part of conference discussion on this issue however, was whether this should be a Commonwealth or state financial responsibility, resulting in no action.³⁶ With states reluctant to commit their own finances for projects designed for partially-disabled ex-servicemen, plans such as the Victorian idea of small parcels of land never officially eventuated. This thesis argues that the group soldier settlements near Sydney would, overtime, become such a project, eventually catering for numerous mentally and physically disabled men.

³³ NAA: A2479, *op. cit.*, 17/997, Land Settlement – Resolutions of Premiers Conference of January 1917 re Soldier Settlement. Memorandum from Prime Minister's Department, Commonwealth of Australia, 8 March 1917. Item 5.

³⁴ Lake, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

³⁵ *The Argus*, 13 September 1918, p. 7 'Repatriation. Village Settlements'.

³⁶ NAA: A2487, *op. cit.*, 1919/185, Land Settlement Conference 1918, Part 1. Letter from the Victorian Department of Lands and Survey, 21 October 1918.

Concern about soldier settlement was raised at a conference of primary producers, agricultural and technical educators convened by the Royal Agricultural Society of New South Wales in late 1918. Delegates agreed life on the land required training or experience, and training courses that determined vocation were essential to prevent failures. Assuming a significant percentage of returned men who would become soldier settlers were inexperienced, delegates wanted to ensure training at an agricultural college or training farm was readily available.³⁷

In a letter to the Commonwealth Minister for Repatriation, Western Australian authorities noted shortly after the Armistice that

the majority of the men already returned are incapacitated more or less, and are not fit to pioneer a farm. The military doctor usually certifies that the applicant would stand a better chance of recovering his health if placed on the land, but recommends subject only to him being given an improved farm, owing to his inability to do hard work.³⁸

The letter recognised many men had returned from overseas service unfit for strenuous physical labour. It implied that medical authorities believed clean country air and a quiet life would help men recover fully from their war experiences.

Conference delegates also discussed differing policies about farming experience for men applying for soldier settlement. Tasmanian officials said they refused applicants without experience, whilst the policy in other states was more lenient.³⁹ A press release at the close of this conference stated 2,420 men had already been allocated blocks of land, men returned to Australia before the end of hostilities.⁴⁰ No mention

³⁷ *ibid.*, 1919/101, Land Settlement Resolutions passed at Conference convened by the Royal Agricultural Society of New South Wales, November 1918.

³⁸ *ibid.*, 1919/185, Land Settlement Conference 1918, Part 1. letter from Department of Lands and Surveys, Perth, 9 December 1918 to Commonwealth Minister for Repatriation.

³⁹ *ibid.*, 1919/810, Land Settlement Conference Part 2.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, 1919/810. Land Settlement Conference Part 2. Press release, 1 November 1918.

was made of the difficulties disabled men could experience on the land. The January 1919 Soldier Settlement Board Conference noted that although training in rural occupations for disabled men had been part of the agenda at the previous conference, no decisions or action had been taken.⁴¹ The lack of decision-making for assisting disabled men become soldier settlers reveals a large gap in Australian repatriation strategy. Fit returned men could return to pre-war occupations or become soldier settlers; severely disabled men would be cared for in repatriation hospitals or Red Cross facilities. Men whose disabilities prevented their return to pre-war occupations but did not require hospitalisation were a class apart. Receiving no assistance, many would become soldier settlers on smallholdings as a last resort, the central argument of this thesis.

In January 1919, the Commonwealth agreed to increase the advance for soldier settlers from £500 to an average of £625 per settler from the following month. At this conference the following quotas for soldier settlement were agreed to.

New South Wales	8,405	
Victoria	5,395	
Queensland	2,826	
South Australia	1,729	
Western Australia	2,000	
Tasmania	<u>500</u>	(settled 1,556)
Total	20,855	
Total Expenditure	£28,773,699	⁴²

⁴¹ *ibid.*, Settlement Board of Australia, Department of Repatriation, Melbourne, 22 January 1919. Heading- Training for incapacitated men.

⁴² *ibid.*, 1922/2779. Conferences regarding soldier land settlement. Letter from Chairman of Repatriation Commission to the Secretary, Prime Minister's Department, 27 October 1921.

In Melbourne, in June 1920, state Ministers for Lands submitted an additional quota and costing as listed below.

New South Wales	1,800
Victoria	5,605
Queensland	2,191
South Australia	2,711
Western Australia	3,000
Tasmania	<u>1,210</u>
Total	16,517
Estimated Cost	£22,881,634 ⁴³

With a proposed total exceeding 37,000 soldier settlers, estimated to cost more than £50 million, Senator Millen could not give the states an assurance they would receive any extra financial assistance, informing Lands Ministers that the Commonwealth was experiencing difficulties raising overseas loans to pay for the scheme. Senator Millen suggested more men could be settled in Queensland, given their large areas of Crown lands. This suggestion was made on the basis of cost, as Queensland averaged £900 compared with between £1,400 and £2,200 per settler in the other states.⁴⁴

Repatriation was a monthly journal published from March 1919 to December 1920 by the Department of Repatriation for distribution to Australian soldiers. Its first issue contained information about repatriation and land settlement, emphasising no returned

⁴³ *ibid.*, 1922/2779. Conferences regarding soldier land settlement.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, 1922/2779. Abridged Report of the Continued Proceedings of Conference of State Ministers for Lands held at State Ministry for Lands, Melbourne, on Monday 28th, Tuesday 29th, Wednesday 30th June 1920.

man would be left without government support to re-establish himself in civilian life. It explained that although land legislation differed between states, land could be purchased to a value of about £2,500. Terms differed between states, but a generous period was allowed before repayments had to be made.⁴⁵ In the next issue, interest charges on soldier settlement loans were explained. *Repatriation* added a note of caution, saying 'every soldier who thinks he would like to become a farmer, and incidentally a land-owner, does not necessarily achieve his ambition'.⁴⁶

Pamphlets were distributed in London to Australian soldiers awaiting transport home, outlining the provisions and terms offered by each state. *Australian Land Settlement for Returned Soldiers* explained on the first page that land settlement was not limited to the fit. It emphasised each state recognised the debt owed to returned men and their families by offering liberal terms and assistance.

Provision is made for all classes of ex-service men; those who are unfit for the more active farming pursuits can choose those land occupations which demand less physical effort, as for instance, poultry-farming or bee-keeping; those who have no capital will be helped by advances on generous terms; those who have no experience will be taught on training-farms.⁴⁷

In this pamphlet, New South Wales was the only state to list the different land tenures it offered, advising further information could be obtained from the Director of Soldier Settlements in Sydney or the Immigration and Publicity Officer in London.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ *Repatriation*, Vol. 1, No. 1, March 1919, p. 3, p. 6.

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, Vol. 1, No. 2, 25 April 1919, p. 3.

⁴⁷ *Australian Land Settlement for Returned Soldiers & Sailors. The Australian State Government Proposals*. Form No. 547, Repatriation & Demobilisation Dept, London, 6 January 1919, p. 1.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, pp. 3-4.

It appears information distributed to men overseas about soldier settlement caused some confusion. A clerk in the South Australian office of the Superintendent of Soldier Settlements reported that

during the last few months a large number of newly arrived returned soldiers have enquired at this office if their blocks of land are ready for them to proceed to. On interrogation I have learned from these men that their enquiries have been made in all good faith, and are based on the fact that the gospel of 'Land for Soldiers' has been preached to them in England and on the troopship to such an extent that they have been led to believe that they will, on receiving their discharge from the AIF be immediately repatriated as farmers under Government supervision and instruction.⁴⁹

In reply David Gilbert the Comptroller of Repatriation, said he could not understand why there was confusion about the various soldier settlement schemes. He advised *Repatriation*, with 30,000 copies printed a month, was distributed to troops in London, Cape Town and Fremantle and contained information about benefits and plans available across Australia to ex-servicemen after discharge.⁵⁰

Although state and Commonwealth governments announced they were actively assisting men gain land through soldier settlement, many men were disappointed and frustrated at their lack of action. W.B. Dalley a journalist with the popular *Smith's Weekly*, outlined the inefficiency and delays providing land for returned men in New South Wales. Dalley explained in *The Case for the Diggers. To Mr Hughes, K.C.*, that men were frustrated by inaction and being passed from one official to another in their

⁴⁹ NAA: A2487, *op. cit.*, 1920/6942. Some questions and answers about assistance in land settlement. 24 February 1919 letter from Enquiry Clerk, A.C. Reeve, Office of the Superintendent of Soldier Settlements Adelaide to Office of Commissioner of Crown Lands and Immigration, Adelaide.

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, Some questions and answers about assistance in land settlement, 1920. Reply from Gilbert, 8 May 1919.

quest for land.⁵¹ He questioned why Australian repatriation could not be the simplest and most generous in the world.⁵²

In November 1919, a meeting was called at the Protestant Hall in Castlereagh Street, Sydney to form a Diggers' Land Union 'to secure united action by all dinkum applicants for land'.⁵³ The Diggers' Land Union pledged to have no political alliances, and intended to lobby the government to act more quickly on land promises. The ex-servicemen demanded action now, believing 'later on we may be forgotten'.⁵⁴ A three page pamphlet explained the need for a public meeting, listing twenty matters for discussion. Of particular interest to the current study is item 5, viz:

A special board to deal with Land Settlement within close proximity to the Metropolitan Markets, and a special effort made to secure Estates suitable for market gardening, orchards, poultry farms, pig raising, dairying for City Milk supply, bee farming and horticulture.⁵⁵

The threat of action was sufficient for Walter Massey Greene, Federal member for Richmond in northern New South Wales, to forward the pamphlet to Senator Millen. On 6 November the Senator released a press statement to *The Herald* and *The Telegraph*. It said that the application for the £625 advance for soldier settlement was simple and had not caused any problems. The statement confirmed the Commonwealth was committed to spend up to £40 million on suitable lands, and to develop road and railway networks as supporting infrastructure. The Repatriation Department had, according to the Minister, already addressed all the concerns of the

⁵¹ W.B. Dalley, *The Case for the Diggers. To Mr Hughes, K.C.*, William Brooks & Co Ltd, Sydney, 1919, pp. 48-50.

⁵² *ibid.*, pp. 51-56.

⁵³ NAA: A2487, *op. cit.*, 1919/10942, Criticisms of policy and administration of soldier land settlement, 1919. Pamphlet: 'An Appeal for United Action of Land Seeking Diggers', p. 1. The meeting was called for 10 November 1919.

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, *Smith's Weekly*, 8 November 1919, p. 23 referred to a meeting of the Land Seekers' League.

⁵⁵ NAA: A2487 1919/10942, *op. cit.*, Pamphlet, p. 2.

proposed group.⁵⁶ Approximately 100 men attended the Diggers' Land Union meeting. Men spoke about their difficulties gaining land, with one speaker declaring 'neither the Federal nor the State Governments had one iota of interest in the settlement of soldiers'.⁵⁷ Calls were made from this meeting for the appointment of a special board to expedite land acquisition close to city markets, especially for small farming enterprises such as poultry, pig-raising and market gardening.⁵⁸ This newspaper report reveals that a year after the Armistice returned men were frustrated not only by the length of time it took to gain soldier settlement land in New South Wales, but that there was a strong demand for small acreages like the group settlements in the County of Cumberland. It is not known how successful the Diggers' Land Union was in furthering the needs of returned men seeking land.

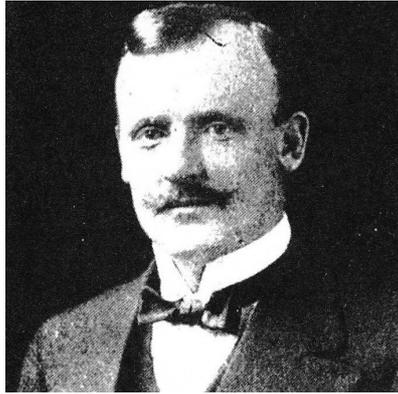
In October 1916, the New South Wales Minister for Lands announced the creation of the Returned Soldiers' Settlement Branch (RSSB) within the Department of Lands, under the direction of Mr J.G. Bryant. John Bryant had been a public servant for many years prior to this appointment. His experience included working as the Assistant Orchardist at Hawkesbury Agricultural College, the Orchardist at Bathurst Experimental Farm, Manager of the Dural Government Orchard, and Assistant Fruit Expert for the state.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ *ibid.*, Suggested 'Diggers' Union', Comment by Senator Millen. Press release to *Herald* and *Telegraph*, 6 November 1919; *SMH*, 8 November 1919, p. 14, 'Land for Soldiers. Reply to Criticisms'.

⁵⁷ *SMH*, 20 November 1919, p. 7 'Soldiers and Land. Speeding Up Desired'.

⁵⁸ *ibid.*

⁵⁹ State Records of New South Wales: Department of Lands, *Closer Settlement Promotion Files*, NRS 8052, Bankstown Soldier Settlement [10/13713]; *SMH*, 26 August 1909, p. 6.



RSSB Director John Bryant
Source: The Sydney Mail, 21 November 1917, p. 16.

The responsibilities of the RSSB were more than just administering soldier settlement in New South Wales. They included locating suitable Crown and private lands for purchase, providing training, arranging the purchase of stock and farming equipment and selecting settlers for group settlements.⁶⁰ Directly responsible to the Minister, the RSSB was an autonomous section within the Department of Lands.⁶¹

In February 1918, the New South Wales Government released a sixteen page pamphlet titled *Land for Soldiers*, outlining soldier settlement in this state. The small booklet contained descriptions of the types of tenure and available financial assistance. It also noted information about ‘tenures recommended as particularly applicable to the circumstances’ which indicated ex-servicemen without experience or capital and those with disabilities were eligible for some types of landholdings.⁶² Any person who had served abroad in the Australian Military or Naval forces, or enlisted but was retained in Australia could apply for land. A Qualification Certificate proving

⁶⁰ Pryor, *op. cit.*, p. 193.

⁶¹ Sparkes, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

⁶² *Land for Soldiers*, W.A. Gullick, Government Printer, Sydney, February 1918, p. 1.

the person's right to apply had to accompany the land application.⁶³ The Qualification Certificate provided proof of service and an honourable discharge.

No 1916
L 116

Form 1.
RETURNED SOLDIERS SETTLEMENT ACT, 1916.

APPLICATION FOR QUALIFICATION CERTIFICATE TO APPLY FOR CROWN LAND.

(1) Name in full: **I, Leonard Arthur Vincent Beckett**

(2) My full address: of **101 Spencer Road, Roseman**

hereby notify that I desire to obtain the necessary qualification certificate entitling me to apply for a holding under the Returned Soldiers Settlement Act, 1916.

If the certificate be granted to me, the class of holding, area and Land District which I would prefer are:—

Class of holding: **Ret^d Soldier's Holding Area**

Area: **5 Acres**

Land District: **Belconnen**

In support of this application I have made the statutory declaration on the back hereof.

Signed this **eight** day of **November** 1916.

Signature: **Leonard A. Beckett**

TO THE UNDER SECRETARY FOR LANDS,
SYDNEY.

(OVER)
20-412

Received	DECISION.
Entered	Received 9. 11. 16
Notice to attend	Certificate handed 9. 11. 16
Date of Inquiry:	

DECLARATION BY APPLICANT.

I, **Leonard Arthur Vincent Beckett** of **101 Spencer Road, Roseman** do hereby solemnly declare and affirm that I am the person making the application on the preceding page, and that the replies to the questions hereinafter set forth are true and correct.

Question	Answer
(1) Of what Naval or Military Force were you a member?	Australian Imperial Force
(2) Where did you enlist?	Sydney
(3) Where did you reside at the time of enlistment?	Sydney
(4) Where did you serve?	Sydney & Balikpapan
(5) What was—	
(a) Your length of service in such Force?	1 year 307 days
(b) The date of your discharge?	6 November 1916
(c) The reason of your discharge?	Necessity of my discharge
(d) Regimental No. and Battalion?	15th 1st Battalion
(6) What physical disabilities (if any) do you suffer from by reason of wounds or disease resulting from your naval or military service? State particulars as to loss of limb or faculty, or as to condition of health?	Loss of right fore arm Health otherwise good
(7) What was your occupation prior to enlistment? State period.	Carpenter 12 years
(8) For what business or purpose do you intend to use the land for which you would apply?	Country farming
(9) What expenses have you had (if any) in any kindred business?	No expenses
(10) What is the amount of capital at your disposal?	About £100
(11) Are you single, married, or a widower? If married or a widower, state number of children dependent on you.	Married no children
(12) What land (if any) do you at present own or have you an interest in? State particulars.	No
(13) If married, what land (if any) does your wife own or has she an interest in? State particulars.	No

And I make this solemn declaration as to the matters aforesaid according to the law in this behalf made, and subject to the punishment by law provided for any wilfully false statement in any such declaration.

Signature of Declarant: **Leonard A. Beckett**

Made before me at **Sydney** }
this **eight** day of **November** 1916.

A. W. Brumby
A Justice of the Peace
Commissioner of the Supreme Court
for taking Affidavits,
Notary Public, &c. Crown Land Agent.

*Application for Qualification Certificate to Apply for Crown Land.
Leonard Arthur Vincent Beckett. 8 November 1916.*

Source: State Records of New South Wales: Department of Lands, RSS Miscellaneous files, c1916-39, NRS 8056.

Soldier settlement tenures available in New South Wales were: Homestead Farm, Crown Lease, Returned Soldiers' Special Holding, Suburban Holding, Group Settlement Purchase and Settlement Purchase under the Closer Settlement Promotion Act.⁶⁴ Homestead Farms and Returned Soldiers' Special Holdings were both leased in perpetuity, with title granted by the crown five years from confirmation. A Crown Lease was available on a property for forty-five years. The *Closer Settlement Promotion Act* allowed for the purchase of privately-owned land pending approval by

⁶³ *ibid.*, p. 7.

⁶⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 7-10.

the Minister for Lands. Irrigation farms could also be settled by returned men.⁶⁵ The simplest and most comprehensive explanations in this booklet were for group settlement. The information therefore, was geared towards men with no farming background and was the only tenure deemed suitable for war-disabled ex-servicemen.

A more generalised publication, *The New South Wales Handbook for Returned Soldiers and Sailors*, was intended to inform ex-servicemen of what the state offered ‘when the time arrives at which they have to think seriously about settling down once more to civil occupations and resuming their duties as good citizens of the State’.⁶⁶ This booklet contained information not only on land settlement, but on entitlements prior to and after discharge, ‘in other words – to tell the soldier where to go for what he requires’.⁶⁷

Under the sub-heading of land settlement it explained soldier settlement would ‘make it possible for a man, by intelligence and industry, to establish himself as a landholder, and to make for himself and his family a good home and a good living’.⁶⁸ The government was making every effort to help the ex-serviceman, and in return he would strengthen his community and the nation’s economy. The booklet’s frontispiece noted information was not just for returned men of the AIF. A boxed section in bold italic print stated ‘NOTE. Throughout this book the term ‘Returned Soldier’ includes Soldiers, Sailors and Nurses’.⁶⁹ In the 1917 *Australian Soldiers’*

⁶⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 7-10.

⁶⁶ *The New South Wales Handbook for Returned Soldiers and Sailors*, The A.I.F. Furlough (State Privileges) Bureau, W.A. Gullick, Government Printer, Sydney, 1919, foreword.

⁶⁷ *ibid.*

⁶⁸ *ibid.*, p. 11.

⁶⁹ *ibid.*, frontispiece.

Repatriation Act, nurses had been included under the terminology of ‘soldier’.⁷⁰ However, in mid-1919 the Minister for Repatriation announced that returned nurses were currently only eligible to apply for soldier settlement in New South Wales and Victoria. Although any decision to include nurses as eligible for soldier settlement remained the right of individual states, the Commonwealth government wanted all states to have standardised selection criteria.⁷¹ By mid-1920 legislation had been amended in all states to include nurses as being eligible for soldier settlement.⁷² It is not known how many nurses, single or married, attempted or were successful in gaining land under soldier settlement schemes, however research into this area is ongoing.⁷³

The decision to promote group settlement in New South Wales was made soon after the *Returned Soldiers’ Settlement Act* became operational in July 1916. Reporting in April 1917 on plans for soldier settlement, Arthur Hare, the Under-Secretary for the Department of Lands, stated ‘in connection with soldier settlement it has been approved to establish group settlement working as far as possible on co-operative lines’.⁷⁴ Director Bryant of the RSSB believed group settlement was ‘clearly a sound policy’ for men with little or no farming experience.⁷⁵ Group settlement purchase, therefore, was an option for men with disabilities or no farming experience. The government said farms would be in areas suitable for a range of different farming

⁷⁰ S. Williams, ‘Soldier Settlement for Returned Army Nurses Post First World War’, *When the Soldiers Return Conference Proceedings*, 2007, p. 175.

⁷¹ *SMH*, 21 July 1919, p. 5.

⁷² NAA: Repatriation Department; A2489, *Correspondence files, ‘Red’ series, 1920; 1920/1575*, Returned Soldiers’ Land Settlement Scheme: Extension to Nurses, 1919-1920. Queensland – February 1920, Tasmania – May 1920, all other states by September 1919.

⁷³ S. Williams, ‘“Not Openly Encouraged” – Nurse Soldier Settlers After World War I’, M.A. (Hons), University of New England, 2010.

⁷⁴ NAA: Repatriation Department; A2479, *Correspondence files annual single number series 29 August 1916- 14 September 1918; 17/1804*. Miscellaneous Data on Land Settlement. Compiled by Various States. Memo dated 12 April 1917.

⁷⁵ *ibid.*, The Establishment of Group Settlements of Returned Soldiers, J.G.R. Bryant, 17 March 1917.

activities, with each farm supplied with improvements, equipment and training. Work, at least in the initial stages, would be co-operative. A manager would live on each settlement, allowing easy access for advice and instruction for inexperienced men.⁷⁶ Group soldier settlement was packaged as a perfect solution for returned men who had no farming skills or those who would need help with farm chores. Additionally, each small property had a new house built on it, providing returned men with their own home. With war pensions insufficient to live on, group settlement was a realistic option for partially-disabled men. How they fared after making this decision is the subject of later sections of this thesis.

Group soldier settlement was promoted as a new type of land policy for this state. A letter from the Minister for Lands to Premier Holman refers to the lack of cabinet discussion of policy for the RSSB. As a result the Minister took the initiative and formulated the policy, later acknowledging that the Premier personally supported his plans.⁷⁷ Writing to the Acting Prime Minister explaining the rationale for the introduction of group settlement, Holman said it had been adopted as an alternative to the high costs associated with settling returned men on mixed farming and grazing properties.⁷⁸ The letter said the decision had been made to introduce this form of settlement after careful assessment. Among the industries targeted for future success for intensive farming under the soldier settlement scheme were poultry farming, viticulture and market gardening.⁷⁹ The New South Wales government committed itself to group settlement on smallholdings because of financial considerations to the state, but also to minimise individual settler's debts. As noted in the previous chapter,

⁷⁶ *Australian Land Settlement for Returned Soldiers and Sailors, op. cit.*, p. 4; Appendix C.

⁷⁷ SRNSW: Department of Lands, *Returned Soldier Settlement Miscellaneous Files*, NRS 8056 [19/7028], Letter from Minister for Lands to the Premier, Mr Holman, 12 April 1919.

⁷⁸ *ibid.*, letter from Premier's Department to the Acting Prime Minister, 10 June 1919.

⁷⁹ *ibid.*

Premier William Holman had been committed to extending closer settlement before the war, and supported planned co-operative communities since the utopian movement of the 1890s. The introduction of group soldier settlement by his government, although innovative, was a policy that agreed with Holman's long-held personal beliefs.

The previous year a memo from Director Bryant to the Minister outlined that Bankstown group settlement was a 'new departure in land settlement'.⁸⁰ Bryant regretted the lack of control his department had over independent men who had taken soldier settlement poultry blocks in the County of Cumberland, as supervising these men would be difficult and expensive. However, the great advantage of group settlement was that the state would retain greater control of its investment because of closer supervision.⁸¹ An examination of applications by RSSB staff revealed that few men applying for land had any farming experience. As Director Bryant declared,

if returned soldiers were permitted to select land promiscuously throughout the State thousands of pounds would be very quickly misspent... As a result of this new policy Group Settlements have been established throughout the State, and I am anxious that approval be granted to extend this form of settlement.⁸²

With little suitable Crown lands close to cities or towns available for smallholdings, group settlement provided several solutions to the problem of meeting the agreed quota of soldier settlers for this state. Inexperienced men could be trained on-site, with permanent staff present to check on their progress. Financial outlay to the government was minimalised and men would be gainfully employed on their own

⁸⁰ *ibid.*, letter from Bryant, 4 April 1918 to the Hon. the Minister.

⁸¹ *ibid.*, 'numbers of soldiers are taking up land for poultry farming throughout the County of Cumberland and in these individual cases the Department will not doubt have great difficulty in protecting their interests. At Bankstown the settlers are under direct control'. Shortly after, Bryant again reinforced this point, writing to the Minister, in regard to inexperienced returned men becoming poultry farmers, 'it is therefore necessary to exercise the strictest supervision over operations', 8 April 1918.

⁸² *ibid.*, Memo to the Minister from Bryant 8 April 1918.

properties. Additionally, men had been informed work on group soldier settlements would be performed co-operatively, at least in the beginning stages, allowing men recovering from injuries to work at their own pace. Training facilities including farms and agricultural colleges offered only limited places for short courses, whilst group settlement had the advantage of on-the-job training, immediately providing a permanent home for the ex-serviceman and his family.

Group soldier settlements in New South Wales were promoted as being different from land tenures available elsewhere. Appealing to a significant percentage of returned men, the government advertised group purchase as suitable for settlers with little or no experience or capital. Reminiscent of group settlements in the 1890s, as discussed in Chapter Two, the literature said co-operative work preparing crops, harvesting and marketing produce would be advantageous for all residents on group settlements.⁸³ To assist men learn their new vocation, resident managers, preferably also returned men, would be employed by the government to give on-site training and assistance.

Information on group settlement properties in 1918 and 1919 said they were already set up and under production, so little extra establishment work was required.⁸⁴ This information provided further incentive to choose group settlement for men unable to carry out strenuous physical labour.

By January 1918, eleven estates had been acquired in New South Wales under the *Closer Settlement Act*, in addition to land at Bankstown being purchased under the *Crown Lands Consolidation Act* of 1913.⁸⁵ The Bankstown property, originally part

⁸³ NAA: A2487, *op. cit.*, 1919/5467, Land Settlement – Details of State Governments measures and schemes, 1918-1919.

⁸⁴ *ibid.*

⁸⁵ Pryor, *op. cit.*, p. 219; *SMH*, 30 January 1918, p. 10.

of Georges Hall Park Estate, was offered to the government in September 1916 for £6,000.⁸⁶ Bankstown was the first group purchase soldier settlement in the County of Cumberland, with subsequent group settlements retaining the same model.⁸⁷ There was an over-reliance in these group settlements on the expertise of James and Edwin Hadlington, State Poultry Experts, and John Bryant, a former Fruit Expert and newly-appointed Director of the RSSB. Their choices of land and type of primary produce intended for the blocks were never questioned. These men were responsible for developing plans for the settlements in the County of Cumberland yet, as will be outlined later in this thesis, they contained land unsuited to this type of farming.

Soon after the Armistice, New South Wales Minister for Lands, William Ashford, announced returned men would be settled on small farms in the most populated areas of the state, the counties of Northumberland and Cumberland.⁸⁸ The New South Wales RSSB believed group settlements would ‘safeguard the department’s interests’ by policing men in groups, monitoring their progress and their production. Explaining the rationale behind group settlement, officials realised

that the bulk of the men were unused to rural life and inexperienced in farming pursuits greatly accentuated the difficulties of successfully settling them on the land, while the dependence of the majority upon capital furnished by the State demanded that for this – if for no other reason – every possible precaution should be taken to obviate failures.⁸⁹

This report noted past mistakes would be avoided by the new policy of group settlement which would ‘exercise strict supervision over individual expenditure’ and

⁸⁶ SRNSW: Department of Lands, *Closer Settlement Promotion Files*, NRS 8052, *op. cit.*

⁸⁷ New South Wales Parliamentary Papers, 1922, Vol. 1. Progress Report from the Select Committee on the Soldier Settlements, November 1922, p. 306, p. 308, p. 310.

⁸⁸ *SMH*, 7 December 1918, p.12. The County of Northumberland is to the north of Sydney and includes Newcastle and the Hunter districts.

⁸⁹ SRNSW: NRS 8056 [19/7028], *op. cit.*, ‘Settling our Returned Soldiers. How the Work is Progressing’. This report is undated, but from other material contained in the file appears to be from about March 1919.

provide instruction to inexperienced men.⁹⁰ Confidently stating that the government's initiative of group settlement was viewed with interest by other governments worldwide, and 'followed in principle in up-to-date America', group soldier settlement was portrayed as modern and innovative.⁹¹ Among the many advantages of group settlement were economical instruction, small acreages with low costs, a 'comfortable' income and with easy access to urban facilities.⁹² Planning to expand the group settlement policy across the state, authorities were convinced the model would be a success.⁹³

Given their war experiences, no mention was made throughout this document of possible problems returned men might have on their farms. A powerful piece of propaganda, the document is designed to show the New South Wales government's policy of group settlement in the best possible light. The physical and mental condition of the men who would choose this type of settlement appears to have been given no consideration.

Some commentators realised quite early that the scheme across Australia, estimated in the planning stages to cost about £60 million, was 'too vast [and] too complicated'.⁹⁴ These arguments would later prove correct. Even before the establishment of the first group soldier settlement in this study at Bankstown, it was reported that whilst poultry farming had become popular in the district, it was an industry that realistically required a few hundred pounds capital to support a family, which was money that

⁹⁰ *ibid.*

⁹¹ *ibid.*

⁹² *ibid.*

⁹³ *ibid.*, Memo from Director Bryant to the Minister for Lands, 8 April 1918.

⁹⁴ *The Argus*, 20 July 1917, p. 6.

none of these soldier settlers possessed.⁹⁵ Only a year after the war, Victorian poultry farmers were leaving the industry, convinced there was no future in it because of rising costs and diminished returns.⁹⁶ All of these factors failed to raise alarms bells with officials planning poultry group soldier settlements in New South Wales.

Press releases assisted the government and actively promoted the role of the New South Wales government in ‘providing for our returned soldiers’.⁹⁷ In a two page spread which included several photographs in *The Sydney Mail* in November 1917, the ‘ready-made farms’ on fruit-growing and poultry settlements were highly praised. Readers were told that ‘the soldier settler who was fortunate to secure a block at Bankstown entered into occupation of a fully equipped poultry farm, planned on the most approved principles’.⁹⁸ To prove that maimed men could become farmers on group settlements, the article said the twelve poultry blocks at Grantham at Seven Hills, with ‘close proximity to the railway station and the stud farm makes these blocks particularly suitable for men whose infirmities render them unfit to enter the industry otherwise than under ideal conditions’.⁹⁹

⁹⁵ *SMH*, 21 June 1916, p. 5, ‘but the man with a family to keep had better wait until he has two or three hundred pounds at least’.

⁹⁶ *The Argus*, 16 January, p. 6; 17 January 1920, p. 21.

⁹⁷ See, for example *The Sydney Mail*, 14 November 1917, pp. 10-11, ‘Providing for our returned soldiers. Settling the men on the land’; *The Sydney Mail*, 27 November 1918, pp. 8-9, ‘Soldier Settlements. What New South Wales is Doing’.

⁹⁸ *ibid.*, 14 November 1917, p. 10.

⁹⁹ *ibid.*



Source: *The Sydney Mail*, 14 November 1917, p. 11.

A year later in November 1918, the same newspaper carried an article about group soldier settlements.¹⁰⁰ It discussed many of the advantages the group settlement at Bankstown had over ‘older communities’. The article was geared to appeal not only to the returned serviceman but to his wife and family, describing wide tree-lined roads that contained a utopian settlement, a setting truly fit for heroes.

The neat bungalow cottages of the settlers, of rustic weatherboard, are models of their kind, and the wide spaces that separate the houses give quite a pleasing effect. Gardens have been formed, flowers are blooming, fruit trees are rapidly growing, and the community is a healthy and contented one. Rosy-cheeked children are in evidence. A store has been opened, and is doing a thriving business; a Post Office has been established, and a progress association is displaying active interest in the promotion of the social and moral wellbeing of the community... A chat with the settlers convinces one that many are ‘making good’. They attribute this to the practical advice given in the management of their farms generally.¹⁰¹

Later press releases continued to promote group settlement in New South Wales. In these, the government acknowledged pre-war land policies had resulted in large numbers of failures. However, the state’s need for increased primary production was vital post-war. The difficulty for the government was finding new lands suitable for

¹⁰⁰ *ibid.*, p. 9, p. 31, ‘A Street in the Soldiers’ Settlement at Bankstown’.

¹⁰¹ *ibid.*

cultivation. As little suitable Crown lands remained available, and most arable land near the coast was already in use, it meant a different approach was needed for soldier settlement that would still guarantee success. However, it was quickly recognised that major difficulties included the prohibitive cost of resuming private property, and the inexperience of most applicants, so an 'entirely new system' had to be found.¹⁰²

The government's answer was to develop and introduce the new policy of group settlement, one it believed addressed all the problems of the past. Former haphazard land policies had been abandoned, resulting in the belief that this form of settlement was the way of the future. The policy's advantages were in reduced costs with practical and economical training and supervision for the government, and smaller debts to settlers but with quick and good returns. Several primary industries had been considered suitable for group soldier settlement, including viticulture, some fruit and market gardening, and poultry and pig farming.¹⁰³ Clearly already being cited as a success in government ranks, Director Bryant said 1,550 men would be allocated group settlement farms in 1919.¹⁰⁴

As early as 1918, Elwood Mead's *Summary of Soldier Settlements in English-Speaking Countries* reported New South Wales was already having difficulty meeting returned men's demand for land, and had chosen to focus on co-operative land usage and marketing.¹⁰⁵ However, New South Wales authorities soon realised that intensive agriculture under group settlement required a large capital outlay. It became obvious

¹⁰² SRNSW:NRS 8056 [19/7028], *op. cit.*, 'Report on soldier settlement in New South Wales for publication in the *Sunday Times*'; prepared March 1919, submitted to *Sunday Times*, 7 April 1919'.

¹⁰³ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ *ibid.*, Office memorandum from Bryant to the Minister, 29 March 1919.

¹⁰⁵ E. Mead, *Summary of Soldier Settlements in English-Speaking Countries*, Government Printing Office, Department of the Interior, Washington, 1918. pp. 20-21.

the maximum amount of £500 per man allowed by the Commonwealth government to purchase stock and equipment was inadequate.

As New South Wales expected in 1918 to settle 5,000 men on the land, an extra £1,250,000 from state coffers in excess of the £2,500,000 Commonwealth allocation was needed. As a result, in July 1918 the Minister for Lands asked the Colonial Treasurer to apply for an increase in the Commonwealth government advance.¹⁰⁶ It is evident from government correspondence that a large part of New South Wales soldier settlement was exceeding budgeted expenditure even before most soldiers returned to Australia. When the Commonwealth advance was raised from £500 to £625, New South Wales continued to ask for more finances for group settlement.¹⁰⁷ Although the state government was short of funds, it was determined to push ahead with its plans.

Director Bryant advised that the development cost of Bankstown settlement, not including the purchase price of the land, exceeded £750 per block.¹⁰⁸ On a number of occasions in 1918 Bryant estimated £1,000 was required to establish a new poultry farm, a figure which did not include the cost of the land.¹⁰⁹ This did not however deter plans to continue promoting group settlement, as Director Bryant requested the state

¹⁰⁶ *ibid.*, Office memo signed J.G.R. Bryant 21 June 1918, 'Returned Soldiers – Land Settlement. Advances to Soldier Settlers'. Memo concludes: 'at the same time it might be possible that the Minister for Repatriation might see his way to recommend the increase on the lines suggested in this minute.' This minute forwarded by Ashford, Minister for Lands to The Colonial Treasurer 18 July 1918'.

¹⁰⁷ NAA: A2487, *op. cit.*, 1922/2779, Conferences regarding soldier land settlement, 1920-1921. Memo from the Chairman of the Repatriation Commission to Secretary, Prime Minister's Department, 27 October 1921. The memo states in February 1919 the advance was raised 'to the average of £625 per soldier settled' (my emphasis).

¹⁰⁸ SRNSW: NRS 8056 [19/7028], *op. cit.*, Office memo: Advances to soldier settlers. Signed Bryant, Director RSS Branch, 21 June 1918.

¹⁰⁹ *ibid.*, Memo 8 April 1918, memo 21 June 1918.

provide the extra funding required of £250 per man.¹¹⁰ In addition to these costs that became part of each man's debt, soldier settlers were entitled to claim sustenance payments, which were introduced to tide men over financially until their farms became productive.¹¹¹ The allowances men received as sustenance had to be repaid in addition to the cost of their property, and settlers were told this was 'a first charge against the products of the farms'.¹¹²

In the first issue of *Repatriation* in March 1919, ex-servicemen were informed interest repayment terms for soldier settlement land across Australia were very generous and as low as possible.¹¹³ In the subsequent issue, the interest rates were stated as beginning at 3 ½ per cent, rising by ½ per cent annually, although the highest rate they could rise to was not advised.¹¹⁴ Repayments were required of all soldier settlers, regardless of their form of tenure in New South Wales as follows,

Land – By 38 annual payments (the first 2 years without interest)
House, Water Supply and Fencing – By payments extended over 25 years (first 5 years interest only to be paid)
Tools, Stock, and Implements – By payments extended over 6 years (first year interest only to be paid)
Seeds, Plants, Trees, &c. – Usually in one year.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁰ *ibid.*, Memo 21 June 1918, signed by Bryant; a similar estimate was made for Campbelltown, Memo to the Minister from Bryant 8 April 1918; later this figure had increased to £1,494 which included the average cost of land and improvements, but it was argued this costing was still considerably lower than farms for mixed farming or grazing, which was between £2,500 and £3,500 for land only. Letter from the Premier's Department to the Acting Premier, 10 June 1919.

¹¹¹ *ibid.*, cutting from *The Telegraph*, 22 April 1919, no page reference. The article, 'New Methods' outlined the new concept of group settlements for returned men, noting that this system gave them 'every reasonable prospect of success'. The article explained sustenance, noting it was a repayable advance. The rates were 25/- a week for single men, £2 a week for married men with an extra allowance of 4/- a week for his wife and 2/6 each for up to four children under sixteen; In reply to a query from the Acting Comptroller, Department of Repatriation, Melbourne, regarding establishment costs for Bankstown Soldier Settlement, Director Bryant said it was approximately £1,300 per farm; NAA: A2487, *op. cit.*, 1923/9561, 28 November 1919.

¹¹² New South Wales Parliamentary Papers, Vol. 1, 1922, Report of the Director of Soldier Settlements for the year ended 30 June 1921, p. 268.

¹¹³ *Repatriation*, Vol. 1, No. 1, March 1919, p. 6.

¹¹⁴ *ibid.*, Vol. 1, No. 2, 25 April 1919, p. 3; *Australian Land Settlement for Soldiers and Sailors. The Australian State Governments Proposals*, AIF Form No. 547, Repatriation and Demobilisation Department, London, 6 January 1919, p. 3.

¹¹⁵ W.G. Ashford, *Land for Soldiers*, Government Printer, February 1918, p. 15.

On group settlements, 'confirmation' was to be granted within a year of having been allocated land, intended to be a probationary period until settlers had proved they were suitable.¹¹⁶ It was a complicated system to try and understand each soldier settler's debt, with debts classified into different categories that had to be repaid over a range of periods. The question of debt was made all the more difficult among allegations by returned men that the RSSB often did not, or would not, provide this information to soldier settlers upon request.¹¹⁷ It is likely few men realised how large their debt soon became, and how difficult it would prove to make inroads into the principal amounts owing. One example is George Steele, previously employed by the RSSB at several of the group settlements in this study as a manager, who became a soldier settler at Campbelltown in 1923.

Steele, G.S. - Block 314 - Campbelltown, S.S.

Total indebtedness before revision.					Indebtedness as revised.				Am writ
Principal	Interest to 31/8/26	Insurance		Total	Principal	Insurance	Total		
Advance	£604.18.1	£92.3.3	Nil	-	£697.1.4	£604.18.1	-	£604.18.1	-
	Sustenance	Other items	Total Debits	Repayments	Total	Debits	Repayments	Total	
	-	-	£248.5.4	Nil	£248.5.4	£313.5.4	-	£313.5.4	£27.3.3
	Capital Value	Date of Confirmation to	Interest to 31/8/26		Total	Capital Value		Total	
Land	£480.12.6	12.9.21	£119.8.8	-	£600.1.2	£480.12.6	-	£480.12.6	£119.8
Summary of Accounts as revised.									
R.S.S. Advance					£604.18.1				
Marketing					313.5.4				
Insurance					480.12.6				
Land					480.12.6				
Total indebtedness to 1st September, 1926					£1398.15.11				

£146.11
85.
211.11

Source: Courtesy Tony Steele

¹¹⁶ *General Information concerning Group Purchases under the provisions of the Returned Soldiers' Settlement Acts*, W.A. Gullick, Government Printer, Sydney, 1920, p. 2.

¹¹⁷ *SMH*, 21 September 1921, p. 9; E.J. McBarron, *The Soldiers' Settlement - (Poultry) Campbelltown, New South Wales 1918- 60*, Campbelltown and Airs Historical Society Inc., Sydney, 1990, p. 31; SRNSW, *Department of Lands, Returned Soldiers' Settlement Loan Files*, NRS 8058 [12/6971] Loan File 3917, McNAUGHT, M. A deputation from Chipping Norton Soldier Settlement to Assistant Minister for Agriculture and Lands, Mr F.A. Chaffey, 20 April 1922, said most settlers had never received a statement of their debt, and the men 'do not know how they stand'.

As shown in the statement of accounts above, three years after he came to Campbelltown Soldier Settlement, Steele owed nearly £1,400, and had not made any repayments. Documents held by George Steele's descendants show that the land purchase was completed in 1946, with an anecdotal reference that final payment was made by two of his children on their return from World War II service. Although a November 1944 review had wiped nearly £200 off his outstanding debt, by September 1952 £191/11/1 still remained owing, nearly thirty years after he had acquired the poultry farm.¹¹⁸

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the Australian soldier settlement scheme from the original report presented to state Premiers by former Prime Minister Chris Watson in August 1915, to features of its implementation with a focus on small-acreage group settlements in New South Wales. It has shown that in spite of the history of earlier unsuccessful closer settlement policies across Australia, New South Wales still chose to emphasise group soldier settlement after World War I. It has shown that although this policy had many advantages, including on-site training and supervision for inexperienced men, costs to establish these small acreage farms considerably exceeded budgets from the time the first group settlement was established. Returned men had been encouraged to become group soldier settlers, assured that their debt would be manageable and that they would make a good living farming on these blocks. In spite of the financial concerns of escalating costs, the New South Wales government continued with the policy, believing their innovation would prove to be the way of the future. The next part of this thesis will detail the initial stages of

¹¹⁸ Correspondence Tony Steele to Glenys Allison, 15 July 2011, copy in possession of author.

development of the six group soldier settlements in the County of Cumberland, the greater Sydney area in the chronological order in which they were established.