First farms

In 1789, James Ruse, a former convict, produced the first successful wheat harvest in NSW. He didn't yield sufficient grain to make any flour for the colony, but he did produce enough seeds for the next crop, which was also successful. This was such a feat in the food-obsessed colony that Ruse was rewarded for his endeavours with pigs and chickens, and the first land grant made by Governor Phillip in NSW. Ruse's 30 acre grant at Rose Hill was aptly named 'Experiment Farm', and led the way for Australia to become one of the most important agricultural nations on the planet.

[1]
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View at Rose Hill Port Jackson

By the end of 1791, there were over 200 acres in cultivation at the Government Farm, Rose Hill. The success of the Ruse experiment encouraged Governor Phillip to grant land, livestock, agricultural tools, seed and assigned convict workers to settlers and emancipists willing to farm.

On arrival at Botany Bay, Captain Arthur Phillip had claimed all of the land for the British Crown. As the first Governor of New South Wales, he was able to grant parcels of land to free settlers, soldiers and former convicts. These land grants were usually small, and required the grantee to live on and work the land. This was beneficial because it enabled the grantee to sustain himself, his family and his convict workers and perhaps make some profit by selling his produce. It also meant that fewer people needed to be supported by the Government stores.

An anonymous letter, written in Parramatta in 1819, described the system of agriculture in New South Wales at the time, and discussed settlers issues with the climate as well as successes and failures experienced with various types of crops and livestock.
Parramatta, 4th April,
February 18, 1817.

Apprec. Friend,

You request from me a sketch of the system for producing at present adopted in the Government, and its general results.

The little experience I have had will enable me to give but a very deficient account of the state of your farm, but such knowledge I have acquired I must candidly contribute to the general information, which I have deemed useful, and which you have so kindly written to me on your recent excursion to the agricultural district of the Colony.

The following table as to agriculture may be prepared by some improved manner:

The climate of this Colony is not corresponding to the Wants of the Agriculturalist, and though we have a shorter and cooler season, I am subject to such frequent and extreme changes, that the cultivation of the land must be carried on with care and industry, and often to come into justing in the city, from home matters and unexpected changes of weather, other has having experienced the difficulties of farming during the severe winters with great difficulty and often to come into justing in the city, from home matters and unexpected changes of weather, other has having experienced the difficulties of farming during the severe winters with great difficulty.
Miscellaneous papers mainly relating to agriculture and land, ca. 1817-1917 - p1

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The present crop season—These drought
Charges, are from excessive drought, excessive
Plains, as we at this present experience.

The great want of rain during the present
summer, rendered many of the farmer’s
provisions difficult, and their banks were ready
all by the succeeding heat and drought. The
early potato crop was generally failed in crops,
and the present crop, are too late to find
exercise in the later crops. The Plains have
now set in so heavy, that a great flood has
overflown the branches of the river, removing
great aids to the land, settling, in the total
destruction of their corps of marines. These floods
of spring in the weather, are equally adverse to
the upland farmer, who is checked in his
endeavors by the destruction of their lands, to
farmers, aided by the Providence. That all right
provision is rendered very scarce, no indeed.

I conclude, tend to greatly to check any attempt
in the part of the settlers in general, to make
permanent improvements in their town. What
you are aware from your own observations
are seldom to be inadvisable, and practically grow.
Miscellaneous papers mainly relating to agriculture and land, ca. 1817-1917 - p2

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a4865003h.jpg [10]
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of Farming. Indeed, to what extent the perfection of the modern system of Agriculture, and the wants of good warm hardy sheep, tend to promote the farming system of this country, cannot be appreciated by practice and experience. These appear to be no small among these who understand the Bungaree; but that this culture, after an unenforced system may be carried to great advantage, and even, as I think, to great extent, the Colony would be addressed with provisions of every description. — All beef, like the meat consumed, except Pork which is a small, but the most, of the finest, not, and of the provision of the land! This is all food to improve under pastoral, and will compel the wants of the land and need to seek food in the interior, or to adopt a system of settlement, by which they may secure and enjoy the best opportunities of their land. —

The regular system of Pastoral Boys has been adopted within my observations, but I am able to form some conclusions, as to the advantages of
Miscellaneous papers mainly relating to agriculture and land, ca. 1817-1917 - p5

Call # A 280 / pp. 1-8 [6]
Digital ID: a4865005
View collection item detail [15]

a4865006h.jpg [16]
of farming here by the following statement of a
Citation. Oftentimes, which was laid down by
one of the best farmers I have met with in
the Colony, as one that might be adopted with
much profit. Success! The mowing of grass and septem
To succeed I understand anything known
in England.

Rye - January
Rape - January

Wheat - January

EARLY - February

Rye - March - April

Rye - May

Rye - June - July

Rye - July

Rye - August

Rye - September

Rye - October

And so
continuously, the rotation of crops, down in Bali, which
can be done down with the Wheat or Barley.

By this above statement, it appeared the Farmer,
may have a team and boy or slide off the
same field annually and improve it every
year. This, indeed, the conviction that
the settlers need not to adopt it, either for purposes
or dwellings, but go on cultivating the ground by
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Digital ID: a4865006

View collection item detail [17]

a4865007h.jpg [18]
by planting oats in the Wheat Fields, as soon as it is receptable; and sowing wheat amongst the crops before the latter is ripe. This can
renewly fertilize the land, and its worst parts
are gradually exhausted." The result arising from
this ingenious system, or want of system, is that
the average of our Wheat crops is about ten
Bushels per acre, when upon the improved
plan of cultivation, in all probability double
Besides the stock of cattle and sheep, that
would be fed on the then Cultivated lands,
by the Green Crop Rotation.—Lacklum, however,
at present, in the extent of land, cannot yield
Wheat that we find on board of that far richer
free from the Ravages of Flood, which greatly
from the negligence of the lowland settlers
in not deeming their crops, carry off large
quantities every second or third year.
At present it appears that Sheep will be
a profitable flock to the Farmer, both from the
utility of holding the land, and greatly in the
form of fine wool, which is now found to fetch
such prices in the London Market, as to promise
great advantage to their farmers as an article.
Miscellaneous papers mainly relating to agriculture and land, ca. 1817-1917 - p7

Digital ID: a4865007
View collection item detail [19]
of Inport. The Great benefits afford mean of improving the lands at Sydney, and the system of villages above recommended would add considerably to the means of keeping these valuable animals.

The above sketch of the State of agriculture in the colony, I hope may meet the approbation of those who have approved it. I send it to you in confidence, that your friendship for me will make every excuse for the defects of it.

Yours sincerely, Friend.
Miscellaneous papers mainly relating to agriculture and land, ca. 1817-1917 - p8

Early land grants

About this item:
Variant Title: Previously titled `Parramatta
Signatures / Inscriptions: Signed and dated lower right `C. Martens 1838'
General Note: Related account book entries, 1837-39: 10 Oct. 1837. Capt. P.P King £12.12.0'; 12 Nov. 1838 … Rob Mackenzie Esq £15.15.0, now in the NGV'; 1 Jan 1839 … Capt. Wright £15.15.0; 4 Apr. 1839 … L. Campbell

Call # A 280 / pp. 1-8 [6]
Digital ID: a4865008
View collection item detail [21]
Esq. £15.15.0’.
Transferred from 247 P in July 1967 to DL 28 then to DL Pg 15 in Feb. 1980

a1528447h.jpg [22]
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[View of Parramatta], 1838 / drawn by C. Martens


Deed, dated 22 February 1790 [1792], to James Ruse

Ruse, James, 1760-1837

Call # SAFE / DLMSF 37

Digital ID: a5512001

View collection item detail

About this item:

Collection History: By descent to Helen Ekin from her husband, Hugh. Given to Hugh by his grandparents, Hugh Ekin and Minnie Harris. Hugh and Minnie were first cousins and both descendants of John and Ann Harris of Moneymore, County Londonderry, Ireland.

John and Ann's sons were Surgeon John Harris, and also George, William and Robert Harris. Hugh Ekin is descended from William Harris whose daughter was Eliza Ekin, nee Harris; and from Robert Harris from whom Minnie Harris is descended.

Reference:

Library correspondence file

Administrative / Biographical Note: Surgeon John Harris (1754-1838) was a member of the Royal Navy and the NSW Corps. He was appointed surgeon's mate in the New South Wales Corps in 1789 and promoted surgeon in
1792. He arrived in New South Wales in the Surprize in June 1790 and was posted to Parramatta. In 1793 he was granted 100 acres of land at Parramatta. He bought the property, Experiment Farm, from James Ruse. He served as a magistrate in the colony, accompanied Barralier exploring the Hunter River in 1801 and was one of the first directors elected to the Bank of NSW. At his death in 1838 he had extensive landholdings in Parramatta, Ultimo and Five Dock.

He returned to England, aged 56, in 1810, to give evidence in the court martial of George Johnston for his role in the Rum Rebellion, and also visited his family in Ireland. He married, and returned to Australia in 1814.

Reference:
Library correspondence file

a2652001h.jpg [29]
About this item:

Administrative / Biographical Note

Philip Schaffer was born in Hesse, Germany. He came to Australia in 1790 where he took up 140 acres at Rydalmere, near Parramatta, which he named The Vineyard. The grant was formalised on 22 February 1792, together with grants to James Ruse and Edward Varndell.
By His Excellency Arthur Phillip, Esq.

Captain General & Governor in Chief in & over His Majesty's

Territory of New South Wales & the Adjacent


Whereas the Governor & Governor in Chief in & over His Majesty's

Territory of New South Wales & the Adjacent,


The Terrestrial, day of August, the thousand seven hundred & eighty nine year.


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Philip Schaffer - Land grant, 22 February 1792

Schaffer, Philip, d. 1828?

Digital ID: a55070001

View collection item detail

a4814001h.jpg
Captain Waterhouse's house, Sidney [sic], the Vineyard, about 1798
About this item:
Signatures / Inscriptions: Inscribed on reverse of drawing "John S Hughes / July 12th 1826"
In another, later hand, "Parramatta River / Vineyard original cottage. the birthplace of the family of H.H. McArthur Esqr / from 1812 to 1832"
General Note: John Sympson Hughes was a lieutenant in the 3rd Regiment. He arrived in Sydney in April 1825 (Sydney Gazette 28 April 1825 p.2). He was still in Sydney in January 1827 when he took a sketch of Elizabeth Bay, now in a private collection.
This watercolour shows the original cottage at Vineyard before it Hannibal Macarthur re-built it in 1836.
About this item:
Administrative / Biographical Note: This grand residence was designed by John Verge for Hannibal Hawkins Macarthur and was newly completed when this picture was painted. The house was demolished in 1961.
Signatures / Inscriptions: Signed and dated lower right "C. Martens 1840".
Inscribed in later hand on reverse of canvas (relined) "The Vineyard Estate. Subiaco. 12.8.39. near Parramatta".
Stamp of "S Holden Picture Restorer 107 Bayswater Road Darlington 29 Oct 1945" also on reverse.
Paper label of "A.M. Jennett Picture Framer, Carver and Gilder..." on lower stretcher bar.
General Note: A pencil drawing "Vineyard H.H. Macarthur" is located at: PXC 300 f.4 Mitchell Library

a928025h.jpg [41]
[Vineyard, Parramatta], 1840 / C. Martens

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First farms
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Edward Varndell - Land Grant, 22 Feb. 1792, and associated transfer document, 24 Jan. 1830

Call # Safe 1 / 4c
Digital ID: a1316001
View collection item detail

a1316003h.jpg
First farms
Published on State Library of NSW (https://www.sl.nsw.gov.au)

22 Feb. 1792, 24 Jan. 1830

Varndell, Edward

Call # Safe 1 / 4c [45]

Digital ID: a1316003

View collection item detail [48]

a1316004h.jpg [49]
First farms
Published on State Library of NSW (https://www.sl.nsw.gov.au)

22 Feb. 1792, 24 Jan. 1830
Varndell, Edward

Call # Safe 1 / 4c [45]
Digital ID: a1316004
View collection item detail [50]

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Life on the land
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Story
Australian agricultural and rural life
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Next chapter
Macarthurs
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