

JAMES MITCHELL

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DEATH OF MR JAMES MITCHELL

ONE OF ALBURY'S EARLIEST PIONEERS. HIS MOTHER AT ONE TIME OWNED ALBURY.

Mr James Mitchell, the owner of Table Top Station, and one of the earliest pioneers of the district, is dead. The record of the Mitchell family is largely the history of Albury. Moreover, it is a chronicle of the pioneering days of Australia ...

The late Mr James Mitchell was a noted breeder of cattle, horses, and sheep. He was also one of the oldest racing men in the State, he was the owner of the celebrated *Cremorne* which won the Sydney Birthday Cup, the Doncaster Handicap, and the Caulfield Cup ... The late Mr Mitchell owned a great number of other good horses ... Tabletop wool is renowned throughout Australia. The brand is also well known to the French manufactures and others on the continent of Europe.

One thing which stands unique is the late Mr Mitchell's record for probity. He had the instincts of a typical Englishman in the matter of honour, his word was his bond to such an extent that even in large monetary transactions not even the scratch of a pen was required to seal his bond. While extremely charitable to those who were even wrongdoers he was implacable to any who showed a breach of what he considered the honour attached to a gentleman never forgiving a deviation from the strict line of truth.



JAMES MITCHELL

A staunch adherent of the Church of England was the deceased gentleman. At the original building of St Matthew's Church he was the largest contributor next to the late Mr T H Mate. He presented the large bell in memory of his mother. Lately he gave a handsome sum for the renovation of the rectory, which was damaged by fire ... The princely donations of £2000 to the now Albury Hospital building fund and the offer of hospital site are still fresh in the memory of the people of Albury and district.

Though the late Mr James Mitchell was the physically strongest of his brothers, yet in point of years, he lived the shortest time. This is believed to be owing to a serious accident by which he was almost killed by one of his Devon cattle. He barely escaped death. He was just saved by his son, Mr Fred J Mitchell, who pulled him away from the bull, at very great risk to himself. That was 15 or 16 years ago.

Extremely accurate was the late Mr Mitchell's memory of the early days. Even in small details his memory might invariably be depended upon. His narratives of Beechworth and the early gold digging days were especially interesting, as after a sale of bullocks to the miners he often had to return alone with a bag containing several hundred pounds worth of gold. He, however, evaded bushrangers by returning a different way than was anticipated, which in him was quite easy, as he was thoroughly acquainted with every track for 100 miles in every direction. As a school boy, on occasion he rode from King's School Parramatta, to his home at Mungabareena and an incident in his journey is worth mentioning because he was stopped at the Murrumbidgee by the flood which swept away the town of Gundagai and caused the deaths of, if it is remembered rightly, about 200 people.

An adept at the language of the aborigines was the late Mr Mitchell. He and the late Mr C H Dight were boys together and learned swimming and other sports from the blacks at Mungabareena. On one occasion both boys came to an agreement that neither would smoke. Both kept their words; they went through life non smokers.

Some years ago, the deceased gentleman paid a visit to the homeland, and his memories of the trip were packed with interest and amusement. He paid a special visit to his relatives, the Heriots, the old English Scottish border family whose records go back to the days of early history as bold raiders on the English side of the marshes.

The late Mr James Mitchell enjoyed life well till a couple of years ago, when his sight failed. He had been a great reader, but latterly was deprived of this absorbing pleasure.

The natural beauty of Tabletop had engraven itself on the late Mr Mitchell's heart, and soul. The method of his clearing of the property was an exception to the general rule; he left clumps of beautiful trees of the finest and best, in their natural growth, instead of denuding the place of its foliage. Thus was given a parklike aspect to the property.

Three weeks ago the deceased gentleman and Mrs Mitchell were at Manly. After coming home Mr Mitchell was attacked by bronchial pneumonia, about six days ago, and passed away yesterday, morning, Mrs Mitchell was at his bedside when he breathed his last.

Besides a widow, Mr Mitchell leaves a family of two sons and six daughters. The sons are Mr Fred J Mitchell, of *Maryvale*, and Mr Herbert ('Bert') Mitchell of *Mullengandra*. The daughters are Mrs Hore (*Cumberoona*), Mrs Tovel (Melbourne), Mrs Kirkpatrick (Sydney), Mrs Houston (Sydney), Mrs James Stephen (Albury), and Mrs A C McMillan (Leetang, Gippsland). The other son, the late Mr Reginald Mitchell was killed in a riding accident at Tabletop some years ago.

THE LATE MR. JAS. MITCHELL OF TABLETOP

THE name Mitchell is perhaps more closely associated than any other with the early and late history of the Murray. The beginning of the Mitchell family dates back to an early period of Australian history ... the Mungabareena station, which then included what is now the town of Albury, and belonged to Mr. Ebdon, was purchased by a brother of Mrs Mitchell's and presented to her. Here it was that Mr James Mitchell passed his early days ... After some preliminary tuition at Murrumurangbong, he had to undergo the more conventional if less attractive course of scholastic training considered indispensable in the upbringing of Englishmen. He was sent to the King's School, Parramatta.

Tabletop Station was acquired by Mrs Elizabeth Mitchell in 1857, and let for a term to the late Mr George Day. She, however, subsequently went into residence there, and it has ever since remained the headquarters of the family. On 3rd October, 1862, at Wodonga, Mr Mitchell married Miss Huon, a step-sister of the late Mr William Hore, of DeKerilleau, Wodonga. Mr Mitchell died at Tabletop on April 3, 1914, but his widow survives and enjoys remarkably good health for her years.

A notable feature in the career of Mr Mitchell was the remarkable combination of skill, experience, and judgment brought to bear in the development of the Table Top property. In the early days small trouble was expended on the improvement of pastoral properties, but in later years as land became more valuable and settlement closer, ring-barking, fencing, tank sinking, and other works involving heavy expenditure were found necessary if land were to return interest on its cost. Then came the rabbits, which at one time bade fair to overrun the entire district, reducing the value of pastoral holding to almost a minus quantity. The Table Top estate,

however, was not destined to ruin from natural or any other causes. By dint of persistent effort and continuous outlay the great part of the holding was cleared of all but trees needed for shade and useful timber, in the conservation of which Mr Mitchell was a great believer; every paddock was watered by capacious tanks and enclosed by fencing rigorously maintained in the best order; whilst as for the rabbit, so far as Table Top is concerned, he has been for a long time simply nonexistent as a result of systematic digging-out wherever the trace of a rabbit could be found, the destruction of all harbour, and the exercise of never ceasing watchfulness

Tabletop, when first taken over by Mrs Mitchell, was of course leasehold, and practically in its original condition. It was the life task of Mr Jas Mitchell to transform this primeval wilderness as a freehold estate into one of the finest pastoral properties in the State. As a sheep breeder Mr Mitchell was highly successful, his wool frequently topping the Sydney market, and indeed establishing in several instances a record for Australasia.

Sources:

The Border Morning Mail, 4 April 1914

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/109836827>

Albury Banner and Wodonga Express, 31 October 1924

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