

PLOD ESSAY:
TWO RIVERS RUN
The story of Gippsland's first pioneer



Flour Mill on the Bass River, Woolami, Victoria, ca.1850. Source: NLA, object number: nla.obj-135235081.

George Bass described Western Port as having “grass and ferns grow luxuriantly, and yet the country is but thinly and lightly timbered. The gumtree, she and swamp oaks, are the most common trees. Little patches of brush are to be met with everywhere, but there are upon the east side several thick brushes of some miles in extent, whose soil is a rich vegetable mould.”

This was mid-summer 1797/1798. George needed somewhere to replenish his water and repair the boat. He found both in a winding creek above the tidal influence on the eastern side of the bay.

Almost 38 years later, Samuel Anderson, the son of a Scottish coastal shipping merchant with no known farming experience, a bookkeeper by profession, who after resigning from a comfortable well-paid job in Van Diemen's Land (VDL) to try his hand as a trader, found himself standing beside the same winding creek not far from where George Bass had camped to repair the boat and refill the water casks.

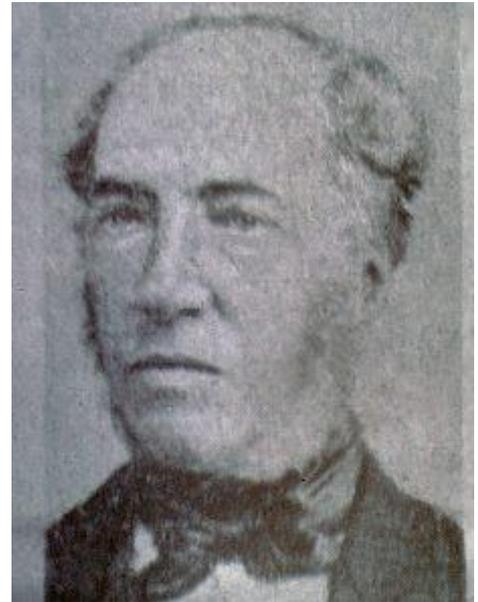
It was mid-spring 1835 with the annual cycle of renewal well underway for another season. There to strip bark from wattle trees for the tanning trade, Samuel noticed, as Bass had before him, the rich soil supporting the abundant life in the area. Leaving his party to continue barking and clearing land for a crop to test a hunch, Samuel returned to Launceston on

Rebecca, the vessel he had recently purchased in Launceston, to get everything needed to plant a trial crop of wheat and potatoes. It is worth noting that John Batman and his party had chartered Rebecca for their trip from Launceston to the Yarra River just five months before.

There had been two brief British Government Settlements in Victoria to dissuade French sovereignty ambitions, the first was at Port Phillip in 1803 at Sorrento, the second in Western Port at both Rhyll and Corinella from 1826 to early 1828. Neither confronted the French and were soon abandoned.

Prior to 1837 the NSW Governor turned down any requests for land on the southern mainland. So in 1835 adventurers from Launceston, VDL, the residents of both the Portland and Melbourne settlements were squatters, mostly pastoralists, whose main desire was to occupy as much land as possible for sheep. They held no rights to settlement land.

By the end of the 1835/1836 summer with a bumper crop harvested, Samuel's fateful decision had led to Gippsland's first permanent settlement, Victoria's third. We now call the winding creek Bass River, George Bass's campsite is now part of Bass Township, and the spot where Rebecca was moored, Bass Landing.



Samuel Anderson original photo, mid-19th century. Source: Two Rivers Run, p.43.

After trying his hand at whaling while working for the VDL Co., Samuel left to find his own way exploiting Australia's abundant natural resources. For reasons we can never know, Samuel chose to plant wheat and potatoes beside Bass River. They were, most likely, Victoria's first market gardeners.

After the bumper crop had been harvested and another planted, Samuel invited close friend, Robert Massie to join him in a partnership that soon created a thriving and productive horticultural business on the south-eastern shores of the Western Port wilderness, far from pretty much anywhere else.

Bass Farm was born! Samuel refers to his station as Weanderra in an 1845 court case between Hugh and Robert Jamieson. The Bass River is given two names in the Bunurong language, Weandon yallock with yallock meaning river or creek.

Three of what are most likely Victoria's oldest surviving pear trees at around 180 years of age, all still bearing fruit, remain from a large orchard Samuel and Robert had planted by 1840. Now on private property, the three survivors are in good hands and being well cared for.

Samuel and Robert, together with the help of Samuel's younger brother, Hugh, created the infrastructure and resources needed to support a large fruit and vegetable garden, a large pear orchard, and about 100 acres of rich alluvial cultivated land, around 150 acres in total.

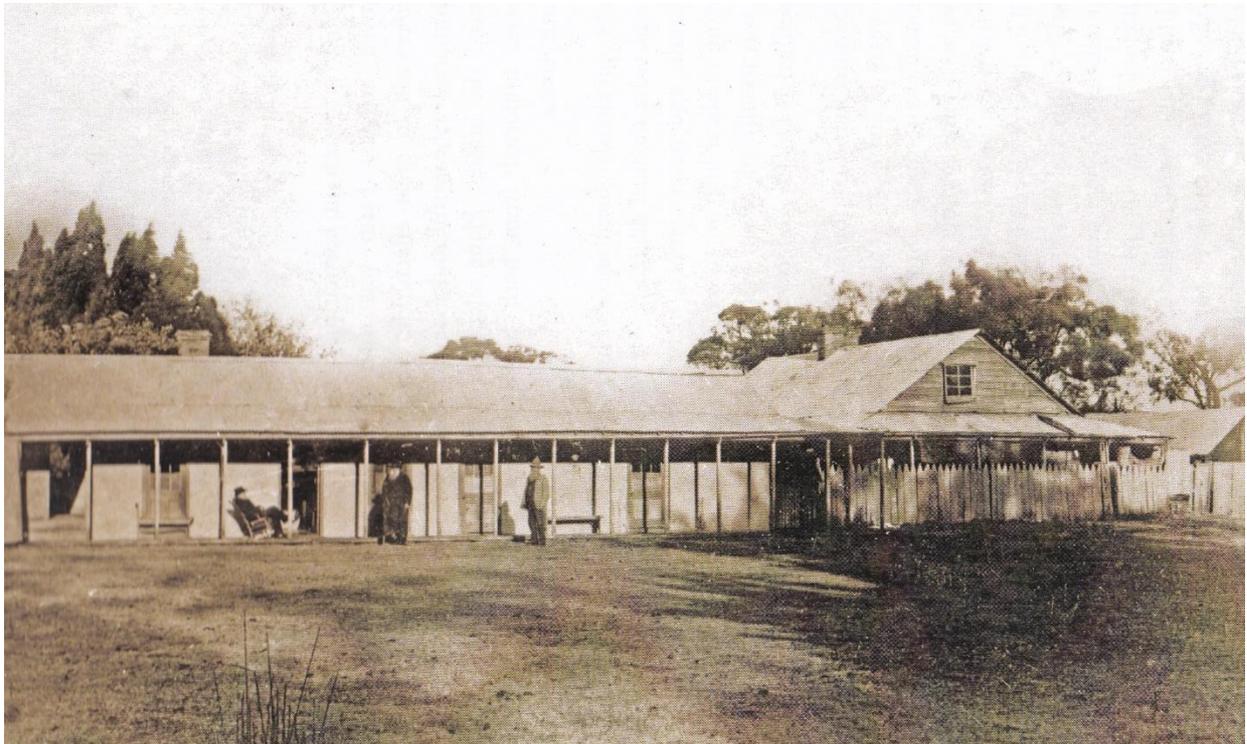
Along the way, they built a 38 foot (11.6m) long sailing vessel capable of carrying up to 24 tons of cargo and, most likely a novel, tidal powered flour mill at the junction of Ross Creek and

Bass River to grind grain for themselves and their neighbours. A roller from this mill is on display in the George Bass Memorial Park in Bass, the only remnant from both achievements. These complex and successful projects were all the more remarkable for being carried out on estuarine flats far from skilled tradesmen, services or suppliers, a testament to their ingenuity and ability. The outline of salt works and its sea water feed channel created by Samuel on these estuarine flats is still visible from the nearby hills in the right light, and from the air.

The arrival in mid-1842 of another Anderson brother, Thomas, the youngest of eleven siblings coincided with a deepening, colony-wide, financial recession causing widespread financial hardship and distress. Bass Farm, created on untilled land with imagination, hard work and resolve, far from help or support, was about to face its greatest challenge.

Samuel and Robert's attitude to officialdom; Port Phillip Settlement officials determined search for their own coal supply; Aboriginal relations; the unexpected arrival of Count Strezlecki's fatigued exploration party; the murder of two whalers at nearby Harmers Haven by a small group of VDL Aborigines including Truganinni; the 1851 separation of Victoria from NSW; the discovery of gold and the sale of freehold land, all played important parts in their lives.

Anderson Inlet at Inverloch bears Samuel's surname, as does the locality of Anderson, named after two of his younger brothers, Hugh and Thomas, and possibly Samuel. Hugh and Thomas purchased large tracts of land on the peninsular to create Netherwood and go on to become successful graziers and important members of society. Netherwood Lane at Anderson still bears the name of the property it once served.



Netherwood homestead, late 1870s. Source: W&DHS archives.

Samuel rests under Gippsland's lush pastures somewhere below Anderson Hill overlooking Western Port. His memorial, together with two of his brother's graves, rest in San Remo Cemetery, atop a hill beside the bay he first entered 186 years ago.

Robert Massie, most likely Victoria's first resident Professional Engineer, won second prize of ten guineas (\$21) in a bridge design competition for Melbourne's first Yarra River crossing. This bridge no longer exists. Robert Massie and Thomas Anderson both went on to marry and raise families, while Samuel and Hugh, an astute businessman, remained bachelors. Some of Thomas's descendants still live on in the Bass Coast region today.

Samuel's Victorian legacy is important, as is Robert Massie's. Hugh and Thomas are well recognised for their role in opening up and establishing a successful pastoral business and their roles in the community.

We will never know why a numbers man who arrived in Western Port to exploit its abundant natural resources, chose instead to become a horticulturist while those around him chose to become pastoralists. A natural leader, Samuel chose his own path, one we can all celebrate.

Hopefully, *Two Rivers Run* can help Samuel and Robert achieve their rightful place in our history.

Copies of "Two Rivers Run: The story of Gippsland's first pioneer settler, Samuel Anderson" are available for \$38.00 per copy from the Railway Station Museum, Wrench's Footwear, and Nutrien (formerly Landmark).

This essay is adapted from the presentation notes of Two Rivers Run author Tony Hughes used at the book launch on 1 May 2021.



*Only surviving pear trees planted before 1840 in a large orchard of possibly 100 trees on Bass Farm.
Source: Two Rivers Run, p.72.*