

Port of Echuca

The riverboat fleet operating from Echuca, became known as the 'top-end' boats; those from Goolwa were known as the 'bottom-end'. Almost every steamer that sailed from Echuca was constructed in the ship building yards established in the town. Shipwrights, engineers, builders and blacksmiths all helped make the fleet. Some of them obtained their skills as apprentices to the trade in England, Scotland and Ireland. Others came from Germany and Scandinavia. When a new steamer was ready to take to the water, the whole town would attend the ceremony of the launching.

Over the 1870's and 1880's river trade was at its height, so much so that the Echuca wharf had trouble in keeping up. In the 1880's as many as thirty boats and barges would be seen tied up at the Echuca wharf, taxing to the utmost the powers of the Railway Department in the process of unloading. Seven hydraulic cranes working day and night on the wharf transferring the valuable cargo into waiting railway trucks.

Scores of men in the railway yards, stevedores, dumpers, tally clerks, crane drivers, assisted in shipping as many as a hundred thousand bales of wool, hundreds of tons of wheat and thousands of cases of fruit in one single year. In addition, there were large quantities of chaff, fodder, hides, timber and liquors.



Left: ECHUCA WHARF
Courtesy Nancy (Cobb) Harm



Right: VIEW OF WHARF FROM NSW BANK

Echuca was the chief town on the Murray and was second only to Melbourne as a Victorian port. The peak year for the Echuca wharf was 1880, when wool valued at £2,500,000 was handled through the port.

River steamers from Echuca travelled extensively to many parts of the Murray and its tributaries – to Albury on the Murray, to Hay and Gundagai on the Murrumbidgee, to Bourke and Walgett on the Darling, to Moulamein on the Edward River and to Shepparton on the Goulburn.

Right: RAILWAY TRUCK LOADED WITH WOOL BALES



Left: RIVER BARGE LOADED WITH WOOL BALES

