

## Maiden's Punt

For many years, the trails blazed by early explorers were followed by stockmen driving cattle across the country. One of these was James Maiden, who in 1840, during a drought, brought stock from inland NSW to a cattle run on the northern NSW bank of the River Murray - Perricoota Station. The lease was held by a relative J. Clarke, who employed Maiden as superintendant.

In 1846 he established the first public punt further upstream at 'Maiden's Punt', re-named



'Moama' in 1851, a word of aboriginal origin. It became an important river crossing and the first land sales were held that year. Maiden built an inn nearby and in 1848 had established a post office.



JAMES  
MAIDEN

The discovery of gold at Bendigo, also in 1851, led to huge demand for meat and Moama for a few years became a busy cattle mart, centred around Maiden's Inn, making maiden a fortune. Then the market collapsed as gold petered out and Maiden's fortunes plummeted accordingly.

## Hopwood's Ferry as Echuca was once known

Henry Hopwood is widely regarded as the first settler and 'father' of Echuca. It was he who foresaw that settlement of the Riverina region, which was rapidly taking place, would make viable the establishment of a township at the most suitable crossing place on the River Murray.



HENRY HOPWOOD

He arrived on NSW bank of the Murray about 1849 and was employed at a boiling down works where, without official approval, he put in a punt and built a rough inn. In 1853 Hopwood crossed to the Victorian bank of the Murray and gained a licence to occupy one square mile of land on the isthmus between the Murray and Campaspe Rivers. The site was well selected and later became the heart of Echuca. In 1854 Hopwood put a 'punt of superior construction' – and later a pontoon bridge – across the Murray below his bridge Hotel, correctly anticipating an increased movement of livestock.

Hopwood's enterprise resulted in Echuca rapidly rising into prominence as a river town. Businesses of many descriptions were opened and the streets were surveyed. The Victorian Government provided Echuca with a Post and Telegraph Office, which allowed the town to be connected by telegraph with Melbourne and Adelaide.

In these early days, Echuca was supported mainly by the overland stock traffic, which in 1856 was valued at £250,000. Eventually, the punt could not handle the volume of livestock traffic, and Hopwood built a 354 feet (108 metre) long pontoon bridge. It is thought that this was the first bridge to span the River Murray.

By the late 1850's Echuca had become a flourishing town. However, the town was set to become even more important with the coming of the river steamers. Echuca's location on the River Murray made it an ideal place for a river port from which it could command trade from the vast territory through which the Murray flows.