

# Tendering ... springboard for business

by

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Recently, *The Age* republished its first edition. This was part of its 150 years celebration. To join in, I spent a considerable amount of time sifting through the events of Tuesday, 17<sup>th</sup> October, 1854.

The first thing you are struck with is what constituted the news. On page 1, it was packed solid with shipping announcements, a prospectus for a land speculation venture, rewards to counter a large burglary and various advertisements for transportation (back to England now and you'll have to pay), hotels, summer clothing, watches, oil and lots of land and liquor. There were vacancies in *The Age* staff and an introduction to the new Journal. Basically, lots of what we would ads today and very little newsworthy content.

What caught my eye, as someone trying to come up with weekly column ideas, was a lone tender announcement. The only tender called for in that entire edition (and I looked through that entire small 3 point font) was an announcement from the Sewerage and Water Commission. This was then part of Town Hall. John Lanktrek, the Secretary, was looking for 'contractors' (some names don't change) and invited 'tenders' (again, the same) for "making and fencing in a new water course from the river Plenty to Yan Yean reservoir." The specs were available from the Engineer's office but suffice it to say the "contract will comprise about 45,000 cubic yards of exoavation [your guess is as good as mine], and about 1500 rods of fencing." You would have about two and a half weeks to get this tender in by the 2<sup>nd</sup> November.

To find some candidates for this prospective job, one only had to look further down page 1 to find R. and A. Porter who had about 6,000 feet of fencing at their disposal and over to page 7 to find a business directory including some builders, two surveyors, and a plumber. If you needed 6,000 pounds of capital, a solicitor, P.A.C. O'Farrell happened to have that kind of money to burn.

Other than that, this all appeared to be a buyer's market. Apart from land transactions, there was a clear business in speculating on importing merchandise and seeing if you could unload it all when the ship came in. By the way, if you were wondering when that would occur, *The Age's* Commercial Department clearly saw an opportunity in 'shipping intelligence.'

But on the other side of the tender market, Laurie Layton and Co., who were Gas Engineers put in a medium size ad on the very last page telling all who might read that far that they had completed the lighting for the Melbourne Exhibition (the event had just run) and the Union Hotel and now they were ready to serve. Any gas infrastructure needs could be satisfied across all of Victoria. And why not "for economy, both of material and labor, for brilliancy and purity of light, this gas is unequalled as an artificial light for churches, also theatres, hotels and other places of public resort." I guess this explains why the new Astley's Amphitheatre on Spring Street prohibited smoking in all parts of the theatre; although it doesn't explain the strict exclusion of "persons of improper character."

For the record, the news appeared halfway through the paper on page 5 beginning with a detailed analysis of the Colony's trade position since 1788 and a commentary – “Is Victoria Healthy?” The answer then, probably not.

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