THE MELBOURNE HERALD Tuesday, June 4th. 1912

INTERESTING MEMORIES - Mrs. MacKenzie, at present a resident of Toorak, is certainly one of the oldest Victorian colonists. With her parents, Mr. & Mrs. Grant, she left London for Sydney in the William Nichol, five & seventy years ago, when he was a child of three. The ship took the news of the Queen's accession to the Cape of Good Hope, where the event was duly celebrated. But speedier craft carried the tidings to New South Wales, where the celebrations were in progress when the William Nichol arrived.

BLACK THURSDAY - Mrs MacKenzie's parents made no stay in Sydney, but came right back to Melbourne, then a canvas town. Of that Mrs. MacKenzie, of course, remembers nothing, and her first vivid recollection of any event which still lives in the public memory is of Black Thursday, February 6, 1851. "I shall never forget the day," remarked Mrs. MacKenzie a day or two ago, "nor will anyone who saw its horrors as I did. We were living at the head of the Plenty in those days. My father, a squatter, was a fairly prosperous man in the morning; at night he had nothing except a little money which happened to be in the house. He lost 600 sheep, besides bullocks; moreover house and outbuildings, with all that they contained, were swept away by the flames. Early in the day I mounted a horse and rode off to see if I could find my younger brothers, who were at school. By the way there had been no school for me, for on the far back, where the family was settled, while I was between six & thirteen, there was no teacher to be found. No one knew that I had ridden off; my elder brothers were away with a threshing machine, and my father and mother had a hundred matters to look to. Fortunately, the fire was by no means at it worst when I cantered away. Had it been, or had it travelled a little faster, it would have been impossible for me to escape. As it was I reached the school, but could not return to the house, or rather to the spot where it had been. When the fires died away the whole six or seven miles over which I had ridden was charred, and there was only one building, a brick house, left standing."

IN MAN'S ATTIRE - "What amusement had we in those very early days? Really I don't know that we had any. Before we went to the Plenty we were living further back. As I have told you, we saw nothing of the schoolmaster, and we saw nothing of the parson. When we got to the Plenty and a little nearer civilisation than we had been, there were three children to be christened. There was very little dancing, but there was a good deal of excitement. In his first years in the State my father worked on various stations, and there was a great deal of trouble with the blacks. Fortunately they were very frightened of firearms, and did not know what poor things the old muskets - flintlocks were still used in those days - were. They were constantly about our place, and again and again I saw my mother dressed in my father's clothes and walking about outside the house to give the aborigines the idea that there was a man about and that he was armed. There was very bad feeling between the settlers and the blacks, and it was specially bad after the murder of a shepherd at Thornton's place. I was too young to know who was to blame in the first instance, but I do know that for a time the blacks were shot down like dogs.

OLD-TIME HOTEL - "When I was pretty well on in my teens, and a little while before I married at nineteen, I visited Melbourne. We stayed at a hotel kept by a man named McLean, whom we knew. It was near Kirk' a Bazaar. The meals were fairly good, and we paid half a crown for them. Knowing the McLean girls and knowing hardly anyone else in Melbourne, I went round with them when they made the beds. Of these "there must have been about forty in one big room. They were only about a

couple of feet apart, there was a bit of mattress, a blanket and a rug on each, and the charge of them was the same as for the meals - half a crown.

THE KELLY GANG - "I knew the Kelly family fairly well. In one sense they were good neighbours. Old folk and young folk alike were always willing to oblige, but they were born thieves. My idea is that the notorious Ned was a far better man than his father. The old man was merely a sneak thief. He would rob you of sheep or cattle under the cover of darkness. But there was nothing about him which the silliest boy who goes to a picture show could admire. The son was different, inasmuch as he had pluck and took the risks of his rascalities. For a long time the Kelly gang made our life far too exciting and uncertain to be pleasant. But, apart from the sneaking of stock by or at the direction of the old folk, we were not personal sufferers; that is to say the gang did not attack us when robbery under arms took the place of petty theft.

BOGGED IN ELIZABETH STREET - "I left Melbourne after my marriage, a girl of nineteen. I did not see the city again till fifty years had passed and was a woman of sixty-nine. When I got into Elizabeth Street, where I had stayed before, I noticed that the bullock teams had disappeared. A team had been bogged half a century before in the street, right opposite the hotel where we stayed. The scene had always remained in my mind. It came back vividly, and my grandchildren were wonderfully amused when I confessed that I was looking for bullock teams and for the hole in which that particular team had come to grief. In those fifty years I was never more than a hundred miles from Melbourne, yet I never came to it. I had many things to interest me, as you may judge when I tell you that I had twelve children, eleven of whom are alive. More than that we had to make and to maintain a home. If the life of the pioneers was dull, they had not the time to dwell on the fact and to get gloomy about it."

Mrs. MacKenzie is one of the pioneer women of whom Essex Evans sang so finely. Though she came, or was brought by her parents to Melbourne three-quarters of a century ago, she still enjoys life and is in full possession of all her faculties. To say that she is far more interesting than the ordinary society woman would be vapid. They are of the women who help to make drapers; she is of the class which helps to make a nation. No connected sketch of her Victorian life has been attempted. For some years it was a wandering from station to station, her father spending a few years on each. Then it was the making of a home, starting in "homesteads" something like the one shown in the reproduction from a photograph kindly lent by Mrs. MacKenzie, and which will be recognised by old residents of the Kilmore district.