

MELBOURNE'S FEUDING FOUNDING FATHERS

John Batman and John Pascoe Fawkner are the co-founders of Melbourne, but both in physique and temperament you could not have found two more diametrically different people. Batman had always been a physically imposing figure. He was tall, broad shouldered, strong, and handsome, whereas Fawkner was short, scrawny and scruffy.

However by the time Melbourne was founded in mid-1835 when Batman was 34 and Fawkner 43, the ledger had been squared somewhat. Fawkner was still diminutive and scruffy, but Batman was now facially disfigured and physically compromised by tertiary stage syphilis. Batman died four years later in 1839 and spent the last year of his life being trundled around in a pram.

Batman had always been an enthusiastic, energetic and ebullient character to whom many people were drawn. However, many others were repelled and regarded him as a bombastic, self aggrandizing liar, who lacked any moral compass.

Like Batman, Fawkner was energetic, ambitious and courageous, but he also had an acid tongue. Even his friends regarded him as argumentative, opinionated, patronising and downright aggravating.

Whilst Fawkner often skirted the edges of the law in many shady financial dealings, Batman plunged deeply over. It is well established that Batman was both a swindler and murderer. It is probably fair to say that whilst Batman's moral failings were far greater than those of Fawkner, history remembers Batman much more kindly.

At the time they got to know each other, Fawkner was the Licensee of a hotel in Launceston, at which Batman frequently drank to excess. Having heard that Batman belonged to the newly formed Port Phillip Syndicate, Fawkner wanted in. Batman derisively rebuffed him and so earned Fawkner's undying enmity.

Inspired by the Henty's unauthorised landing at Portland in November 1834, Fawkner decided to assess Westernport Bay as a settlement site and hired a ship 'The Enterprise'. When his party set sail in April 1835, Batman and the Syndicate were caught by surprise. Batman was immediately told to grab the fake treaties Gellibrand had drafted, take his seven Sydney Blacks, and get over to Port Phillip before Fawkner.

Batman finally left Tasmania in the Rebecca on May 27 1835 and returned with his purportedly signed treaties on June 11. He boasted: *'I am the greatest land owner in the world'* and claimed to have walked about 120 miles in four days (although suffering tertiary stage syphilis). This was promptly ridiculed by Fawkner and others.

The surveyor in the Syndicate, John Helder Wedge, immediately resigned his government post and set off for Port Phillip, arriving at Geelong on 7th August 1835. Whilst Wedge was surveying there, Fawkner's ship docked at Melbourne on 20th August 1835. This site had already been identified by Batman as *'The place for a Village'*.

Both Batman and Fawkner now laid claim to being Melbourne's founder, with neither willing to share the honour with the other. Despite Batman's braggadocio and significant moral failings, more people warmed to him than they did to the vitriolic Fawkner, so Batman became more widely accepted as the founder.

This was helped by a later sycophantic biography that didn't just gloss over Batman's failings it virtually airbrushed them from history. True to his acerbic nature, Fawkner did not let the matter rest. He lived until 1869, thirty years after Batman, and devoted himself tirelessly to exposing him as a fraud. Fawkner gave public lectures about how the morally corrupt and mortally ill Batman, claimed to have walked impossible distances in securing his bogus treaties with forged signatures.

Fawkner had limited success within his own lifetime, but gradually people forgot how argumentative, arrogant and aggravating he was, whilst at the same time rediscovering Batman's flawed character. So 181 years after Batman's death his name has justifiably been removed from a federal electorate and Fawkner has been elevated to the status of co-founder of Melbourne.

Fawkner has however had one more victory. He successfully convinced the public that Batman's famed meeting with the Woiwurrung had occurred on the Merri Creek at Rushall, only a couple of miles out of Melbourne. Fawkner had no proof whatsoever for this claim, but it stuck and is nowadays still regarded as fact.

There were however only two eyewitness accounts to this event, those of John Batman and William Barak, with both accounts being in fundamental agreement. Barak said that the meeting took place near 'Idleburg' on 'Muddy Creek', with this being the translated Aboriginal name of the Plenty River. Batman said that after the meeting he returned to Melbourne by walking 12 miles in a southwest direction and crossing two creeks.

Both accounts therefore place the famed meeting site at present day Greensborough on the Plenty River. To get to Melbourne from there you have to travel southwest, twelve miles along the Plenty Road Songline and cross two creeks, the Darebin and the Merri.