



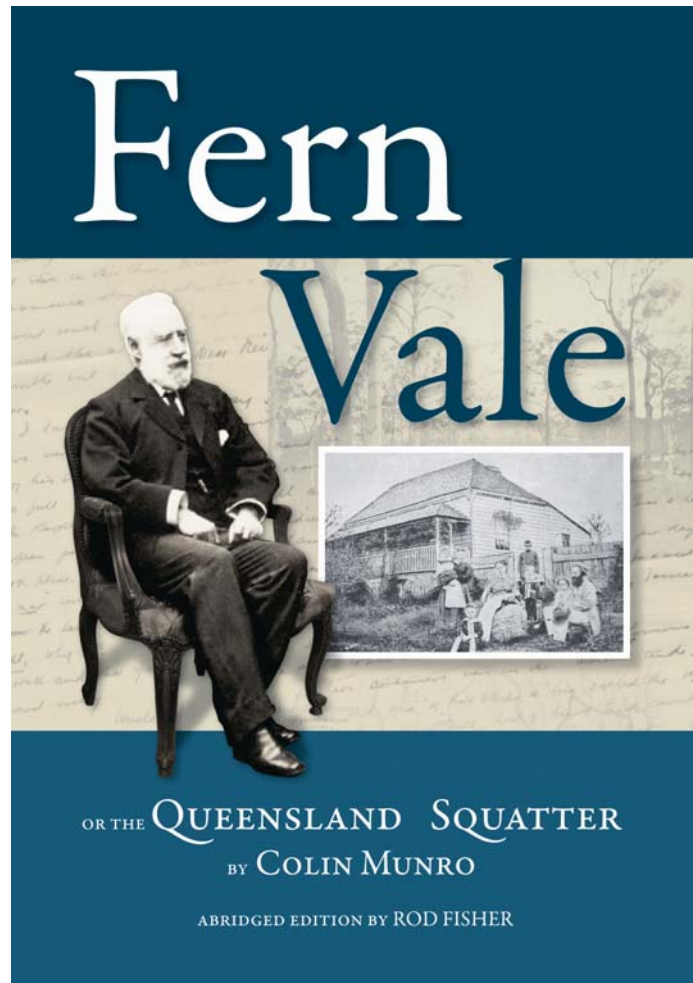
## Brisbane History Group

Sources No. 14, 2011

# FERN VALE OR THE QUEENSLAND SQUATTER

Colin Munro  
(Abridged edition by Rod Fisher)

Has anyone ever heard of Colin Munro let alone *Fern Vale*? Yet this was the first Queensland novel published at London in 1862. The author, of Scottish origin, was merely a young mercantile clerk who, after five years in Brisbane, had gone back to London in 1860 to seek a wife and write a book. This townsman returned successfully in 1863 to become a storekeeper, merchant and Pacific trader in Brisbane as well as a sugar planter on the Albert River until 1880. He then moved north near Ayr to continue sugar farming with Island labour, but diversified into cattle and especially milk-condensing. In 1897 he went south to found the Cressbrook Dairy Co. and later a similar condensory at Wyreema, while retiring to Brisbane where he died of cancer in 1918. Though Munro was an ingenious pioneer in all of those endeavours, he failed to make his fame and fortune. Yet he kept bobbing up like a cork against the tide of adversity – *Fern Vale* being his forgotten monument. While pursuing his agrarian dream in Queensland, this extraordinary man played out the purpose of his novel. Though written as a pastoral romance on the Darling Downs, its real aim was to attract migrants to the new colony during the optimistic 1860s. Taking its cue from the visionary Rev. Dr John D. Lang of Sydney, the novel set in 1856-57 expounds the controversial issues of labour, industry and capital as well as the tropical economy, land regulation, aboriginal policy, convict origin and separation from NSW. While offering intriguing insights into the society and topography of town and country, it climaxes with poisoning and massacring on the colonial frontier. Being a serious work dressed as fiction, the three volumes are now amply extracted, edited with a biographical introduction, contextualised as history and literature, linked narratively with a running commentary, indexed to the original text and illustrated for the first time.



Fern Vale is a bumper 352 pages including maps, illustrations, glossary and index.



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