

CENTENARY OF OMEO

FORTNIGHT'S CELEBRATION

MEMORIES OF PIONEERS

OMEO, Tuesday. — Commencing on January 12, Omeo and district residents will engage in a fortnight of festivities to commemorate the attainment of 100 years of inland settlement. Closely linked with the centenary will be the names of John and James Pendergaat, Angus McMillan, McFarlane, and Strzelecki—men who penetrated the wilderness in 1835 and 1836 in search of adventure. Of these the most revered are the Pendergaat brothers, who succeeded in establishing a station homestead at Mount Leinster, on Omeo Plains, and gradually, by dogged perseverance, undaunted courage, and tact, established a settlement that has grown with the years. Part of the old homestead stands to-day, and branches of this famous family are scattered over Omeo Plains, where they carry on grazing pursuits.

From the settlement of the district until the gold rush there appear to be no historical records, probably because the bushmen of the time chose to keep their activities secret and spy out the land for themselves. Among outstanding figures of the '70's were Fitzgerald Bros., Sheean, Higgins, Murphy, Brown, and Wells, the last-named two being the first to cross Mount Feather-top and Mount Hotham. They named Flourbag, Sugar Mat, and Jim and Jack Creeks, well known on the great Alpine Highway to-day.

With the growth of alluvial mining the township of Omeo flourished, there being a score of business houses and seven hotels, which supplied the miners with necessities from 1865 onward. Bullock wagons traversed the mountains from Welshpool, taking three weeks on the journey—often more. Teams were often bogged to the axles on Fainting Range and Mountain Ash, but such occurrences were treated lightly. As the roads were improved horse teams were employed. In 1870 there were about 600 miners on the field at Omeo alone, and as fresh fields were discovered Chinese arrived, until, in 1878, mining was being actively carried on over an area of many square miles.

A few years later quartz gold was found, and Glen Wills and Sunnyside were established. Companies sprang up like mushrooms, and much money was wasted, but in 1892 these two settlements were well established. In addition tin-mining was carried on, but it proved a failure. Twenty-five years ago alluvial mining waned and quartz gold was not payable, and the once flourishing settlements were gradually vacated. Many men remained on the land and established themselves as graziers, the sale and breeding of Hereford cattle proving much more profitable than gold-mining. This stabilised the district and carried it through trying times, and in place of the shacks that were tenanted by miners good dwellings were erected. In 1892 the post-office, courthouse, Commer-

miners good dwellings were erected. In 1892 the post-office, courthouse, Commercial Bank, all splendid edifices, were erected. The population has remained about 6,000 for the shire, and farming and grazing have spread with marked success. Splendid highways lead into the district and give access to the wonderful Alps country, Tallangatta and Corryong, and there is an air of prosperity among the mountain community.

To commemorate the centenary a committee has been actively at work for 12 months, and a round of festivities, including picnics, sports, and recitals, has been arranged. Members of the Country Women's Association have given their co-operation and have arranged for the erection of a fine fountain at the civic square in Day avenue and the planting of a large avenue of trees at Swift's Creek. The decoration of the town will be on a lavish scale. Old residents have given a cot in perpetuity at the Omeo District Hospital to mark the occasion, and on January 12 a great welcome gathering will be the forerunner of festivities which will conclude on January 21.