

## ROBERT BROWN – ALBURY PIONEER

Robert Brown is said to have been the first person of European origin to settle on the site of the Albury township. Robert's son Frederick, in the *Border Morning Mail* of November 20, 1936, says his father was about eight when he came to Sydney with his parents from Dublin. In 1836, twelve years after Hume and Hovell's expedition, William Wyse selected a run for Charles Ebden, calling it *Mungabareena*. Later the same year Paul Huon selected the *Wodonga Run* near Wodonga Creek closely followed by his brothers Charles and Aime, who selected adjoining properties. Robert Brown, their brother-in-law came with them and built a slab hut on the banks of the Murray River, close to the location of the Hovell Tree. Aime Huon had married Robert's sister Mary Brown in 1834. In 1841 Brown's sister, Eleanor and father, Edward, arrived in Albury. Then in 1845 Charles Huon married Eleanor Brown. Brown himself married Miss Anne Crowe at Campbelltown in 1842. Albury was gazetted a town in 1839 and mail for outlying areas was deposited with Brown. In 1842, Brown established the *Hume Inn* (Albury's first hotel, near the corner of Hume St and Wodonga Place) and by 1844, he had established a punt across the Murray at the end of Hovell Street (which then extended down to the river) and charged £1 for a horse and dray.

Albury historian of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Dr Arthur Andrews, reported that Robert Brown:

was born in Dublin, and had previously lived at Campbelltown, was a blacksmith by trade ....The date of his settling is not precisely known, but by 1836 he had built a bark hut and forge on the bank of the river, near the trees marked by Hume and Hovell. He had also placed a 'dugout' canoe, attached to a rawhide rope stretched, across, to afford passage of the river, when high. This canoe was worked by an aboriginal, who went by the name of 'Merriman.' He was often the sole means of communication between the two sides of the river, when in flood.

In 1837, a passing 'overlander' describes '*The Crossing Place*,' as it was then called, as consisting of Brown's shanty, and about seven tents belonging to travellers. Even in these early days, the importance of the position must have been recognised, for Brown had improved his hut into a slab building, with accommodation for travellers, and a demand for residential sites was springing up. Robert Brown is described by those who remember him, as stoutly built, of medium height, sandy hair, active and determined, very independent, but of a genial and charitable disposition. His first residence is described as "a rude shanty of wattle trees and bark," and "consisted of one department, which was to serve every domestic purpose, except cooking, which, not a very elaborate process, was done in the open air. Near the door 'Bob' established a smithy, for the shoeing of horses, and repairing drays, etc. 'Bob' was middle aged, roughish in manner, but with a stock of good nature, which, in a real emergency, he would unstintingly apply." Brown is credited with being the first of Albury's inhabitants to entertain vice royalty. This was when Lady Franklin passed through in 1839 and stopped here three or four days .... The same year Sir John Hay speaks of Brown's house as a 'hotel,' but he is doubtful if any license was held at that time. Without, doubt, Brown was a good tradesman, and found a solid profit in his business, for a very few years after (1842) he took up the *Collendina* run, and having stocked it, went there to reside, in 1845.... His widow gives the following details: "Mr Brown first settled in Albury in the latter part of 1835 having come overland from Sydney to his late brother-in-law, Mr A. A. Huon. Mr. Huon returned to Campbelltown, and brought back with him his wife and Mr. Brown's father and sister. The latter afterwards married Mr Charles Huon."

*Collendina* is located near Corowa. After Brown started farming *Collendina*, his father took over a blacksmith business in Albury before he too moved to *Collendina*. Robert Brown died at *Collendina* in February 1879. Arthur Andrews had this to say:

He was the first settler on the site of Albury, and during its early years, amassed a considerable fortune. He took up *Collendina* run in the early 'forties.' It then covered a much greater area than now. However, he was unfortunate in his later years, and ultimately only retained a few hundred acres, on which he lived. He was survived by his wife and several children. When able, he was always

one of the foremost in any movement, for the improvement of the district. His contributions to various funds were large, and cheerfully given, and it may be said, that several of Albury's most useful institutions owed their origin and early support to him. He was fond of sport, and a well known figure on more than one racecourse. A severe accident sustained on the Corowa course was the source of much suffering during his latter years.

The following is an extract from an article written in the *Border Post* by Robert Brown:

"When I settled down nearly under the shadeless tree on which Mr Hume carved the name Hume River on November 17 1824, I could little imagine that so rapid a transformation would take place in a few short years, my only companions a few blacks, the kangaroo, the emu, the native dog. Now Albury can boast of its newspapers, fine buildings, steam mills, its churches, bank, court house etc."

Sources:

A&DHS Bulletin 513, June 2011

<http://www.historyaustralia.org.au/ifhaa/bios/robertbrown.htm>

*History of Albury* (Dr Arthur Andrews):

*Albury Banner and Wodonga Express*, 13 October 1911, <http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/101165481>

*Albury Banner and Wodonga Express*, 9 February 1912, <http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/101200331>