THE RIVER MURRAY
Its Influence on Albury and District in the Nineteenth Century

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Tuesday, 16th Nov., 1824 ... we suddenly arrived at the bank of a fifth and very fine river, at least two hundred feet wide, apparently deep, with the bank about eight or nine feet above the level which is overflowed at the time of a flood, and the stream running about three knots per hour. On both sides the land is low and level, and consists of a fine alluvial soil, with grass up to our middle. This I named Hume's River, he being the first that saw it.

- From the Journal of Captain William Hovell

In 1829 Charles Sturt in his historic navigation of the Murrumbidgee River downstream from Yass, entered a "broad and noble river," near Boundary Bend which he named after his friend Sir George Murray of the British Colonial Office. He found that the Murray actually emptied into Lake Alexandrina near Goolwa in South Australia and did not enter an inland sea as had been previously supposed. Later, when overlanding a mob of Huon's cattle from Wodonga to Adelaide, Sturt proved that this was the same stream as the Hume. Yet a third name was given to the river by Thomas Livingstone Mitchell when returning to Sydney from Portland in November 1836. He crossed the stream near Oolong (Howlong) and, rather than recognise the discoveries of his predecessors, gave it the Aboriginal name Millewa (Milawa). Subsequently the name Murray was used, though the river above Albury was called Hume for some time.

FIRST INHABITANTS
Prior to the arrival of the explorers, Aborigines had lived for many years in the fertile areas around the Murray River. The river teemed with over twenty different kinds of native fish which, together with tortoises, frogs, yabbies, native water birds and ducks, supplemented the food supply. The Aborigines improved and developed the land as a result of their burning off methods.

When the European settlers arrived, they were impressed with the fertile pasture land near the river and few realised that this was partly the result of Aboriginal land use. A ford, located at the end of the present Hume Street, became known as the Crossing Place. Cattle, horses, bullock wagons and drays could cross when the river was low, but sheep had to be transferred by punt. After the snows melted and in flood time it was necessary for all travellers to use a ferry or punt. It was not far from the ford that Robert Brown erected the first slab hut, and here a village developed gradually. This later became the town of Albury.

BOUNDARY MISTAKE
The new state of Victoria was formed in April 1851 by dividing the state of New South Wales. Thomas Scott Townsend who had already mapped the town of Albury, was ordered to survey the shortest line from Cape Howe in the east to the nearest tributary of the Murray River. This course should have taken him to the headwaters of the Murrumbidgee near Nimmitabel which would have placed the Riverina in Victoria and divided the states more equally. However, Townsend's straight line went to the Murray which became the boundary. By act of Parliament, New South Wales "owns the whole bed of the River Murray."

According to the South Australian Register, the first voyage down the Murray commenced in May 1851 when Friedrich Gerstacker, in a canoe made from a gum tree left Albury to journey

around the world. Alas he travelled less than 100 miles (160 km) when the canoe sank forcing him to continue on foot, but the idea was there … the Murray could be used for transportation.

PADDLESTEAMERS

Albury was as high up the Murray as the steamers ever traded. Captain Cadell wrote to Albury from Howlong that he would not, after all, be there next day as he could not "waste any more time in bumping on snags, or crawling over them by paddlewheels - both trying, as well as dangerous operations." No wonder then, that anxious scouts were to be found at various vantage points along the banks of the river as Captain Johnston, of Cadell's Murray River line, carefully navigated the last stretch of river to Albury. On October 2, 1855 when he finally arrived, the bank was crowded with people waiting to acclaim the skipper who had at last linked Albury with the 'outside.' The delighted townsfolk presented him with a purse of one hundred sovereigns and his officers with thirty. Captain Johnston carried only "a general cargo, suitable to the wants of the settlers for sale or barter." It was obvious from his welcome that Albury's settlers realised that increased prosperity could follow with the efficient transport of their staple products, wool, wheat and wine.

Albury is a classic example of how the Murray-Darling river paddlesteamers made possible civilised settlement through cheap transmission of the comforts and conveniences of life. For example, heavy baggage of 70 German families who overlanded from the Barossa to north of Albury in 1868, was transported by paddlesteamer.

PORT OF ALBURY

Recognition of Albury as a port came in 1856 and the *Border Post* ran a regular column of Shipping Intelligence, listing the comings and goings of steamers. These included the *Albury*, *Lady Augusta*, *Gundagai*, *Corowa* and supposedly the finest of them all, the *Cumberoona*.

The steamers carried large cargoes. In 1856 the value of merchandise from Adelaide to Albury by steamer exceeded £1,000,000. Until the Albury wharf was built in 1871, cargoes were transferred by swinging them by crane between the boat and the bank. The following year when the river trade had reached its peak, the *Lady Daly*, towing a barge, was said to have carried the biggest cargo ever from Albury - 500 bales of wool and 600 bags of wheat. Even in summer when the Murray was too low to be navigable, consignors of freights were not deterred as their goods were rarely perishable. However, by May 1877 the *Albury Banner* reported that the Albury wharf was falling into decay with the river eroding the bank. The wharf remained a sad relic of the 'Port of Albury,' shipping centre for the products of the Upper Murray districts, until it was finally demolished in 1896.

BRIDGES

By the mid nineteenth century the increasing importance of Albury enabled her representatives to press for the building of a badly needed bridge over the river. The driving of the first pile for a two-lane bridge by the Mayor Alderman J T Fallon, in August 1860 was a most welcome ceremony. Another timber bridge replaced this in 1898. The first railway bridge was a temporary wooden one built in 1883; next year an iron lattice girder bridge was imported from England and assembled. It is still in use. The building of bridges improved road and rail access between Melbourne and Sydney and gradually displaced the South Australian river traffic.

BORDER DUTIES

Where state met state at the river, issues such as border customs duties outraged the district people. The duties were introduced by New South Wales in 1854 and Victoria quickly followed suit. These states could not agree over the tariffs which were continually altered, abolished and

reimposed. In November 1855 a great feast was held to celebrate the removal of duties. From a population of 400 people, 200 paid £5 each for banquet tickets. When tariffs were reimposed in 1872, a Chinaman's load of cabbages was seized and nine pence demanded as duty on them. Public feeling was aroused and a large meeting held at the Albury wharf condemned the government and hanged, burned and finally dropped into the water an effigy of the New South Wales Premier, Sir James Martin! Despite this, interstate customs remained until, with the coming of Federation in 1901, they were abolished.

TOWN WATER

Albury's water dried up in summer and in drought, although many wells had been sunk successfully in areas adjacent to the river. As the township grew and spread further from the river, a dependable source of water was necessary. However, it was not until 1886 that Albury was connected to a water supply system; then water from a pumping station at Mungabareena was turned on for the first time through the town mains. Homes and gardens, business and industry at last had a reliable water supply.

THE FERTILE VALLEY

The fertile river valley with its abundant water first attracted settlers to the area. In the nineteenth century Albury became the market for wheat, wool and wine. The river was a barrier to be crossed by ford, ferry or bridge and formed a boundary between states. For about twenty hectic years it carried the river steamers. The water the river supplies has been essential for the survival and prosperity of Albury and district. In the twentieth century the building of the Hume Weir to conserve and use water for irrigation, hydroelectricity and water supply would alter the characteristics of the river.

Without the River there would be no Albury.

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