



# ALBURY & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC BULLETIN

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513

## REPORT ON THE MAY MEETING (11/5/11)

The Meeting room at the LibraryMuseum was filled to capacity for the May meeting of the Society. Vice-president, Joe Wooding, chaired the meeting in the absence, on holiday, of our President Chris McQuellin.

Bridget Guthrie, Museum and Social History Coordinator at Albury LibraryMuseum, introduced the guest speaker, Dr Barry McGowan, who spoke about the presence and influence of Chinese migrants in the Riverina. Dr McGowan is the curator of the travelling exhibition, "Tracking the Dragon", which is on display at the LibraryMuseum till 26 June 2011.

Dr McGowan's address was supported by rare photographs of Chinese ring-barkers' camps, stores and market gardens in regional towns. Ironically, the garden photos were usually in times of flood, which of course were periods of devastation rather than productivity.

The chairman reminded members that concurrent with the "Tracking the Dragon" exhibition, a conducted tour of the Chinese section of the Albury Pioneer Cemetery is to be held on Saturday 4 June. Chris McQuellin and Pauline Harbick will guide the tour and speak about the graves.

The meeting was also the venue for local history enthusiast and Society member Noel Jackling, to tell a little of his sterling work in tracking down descendents of the crew and passengers of the *Uiver*. Noel was able to announce that next month Mr Johan Domenie, son of a passenger on the DC2 aircraft, will travel to Albury from Florida to hand over a collection of memorabilia including his father's airline ticket on what was the

## NEXT MEETING

WEDNESDAY

8 JUNE 2011

7.30pm at Albury  
LibraryMuseum, Kiewa  
Street.

Speaker: Mr Johan  
Domenie introduced by  
Noel Jackling.

Topic:

"The *Uiver* connection."

## CEMETERY WALK

Join a conducted tour of  
the Chinese section of the  
Albury Pioneer Cemetery  
Saturday 4 June 2011 com-  
mencing at 2.p.m.

Meet at the Lychgate David  
Street  
Stay for a BYO picnic afternoon  
tea.

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Tracking the Dragon	Page 2
More River Walk Notes	Page 3
MacRobertson medal	Page 4
AGM Nominations	Page 4

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ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION

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Enquiries in writing with \$25

**History Meetings:** 2nd Wednesday  
of the month 7.30pm at Commercial  
Club Albury.

Committee meets 3rd Wednesday of  
the month 5.15pm at Albury  
LibraryMuseum.

A&DHS website:

[www.alburyhistory.org.au](http://www.alburyhistory.org.au)

first commercial airline service to Australia. Noel showed several photographs which gave a tantalising glimpse of the items in the Domenie Collection.

Chairman Joe Wooding, presented the recommendation of the committee to postpone the Annual General Meeting of the Society, usually held in June, to 13 July. Such a move is allowable under the Constitution. It was considered necessary because Johan Domenie is to speak at the June meeting and there will be the opportunity to view the Uiver collection. There were no objections.

Joe then concluded the formal proceedings by thanking Bridget Guthrie and the Library-Museum for the use of the facility to hold the meeting.

Supper followed and few showed much inclination to go home.

### **TRACKING THE DRAGON**

#### **Report on a talk by Dr Barry McGowan**

Dr McGowan challenged the stereotype of the Chinese, in 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century New South Wales, as bonded coolies working on the gold-fields; generally despised by European society and subject to outrages such as the Lambing Flats Riots (1860-61). Instead his research, and that of others, revealed a startlingly different picture of free men who brought skills and application to the developing colony. This was particularly so in the Riverina. The Chinese were considered industrious, sober, reliable and, contrary to the perception that they worked for low wages, often demanded and were paid higher wages than white labour. Certainly some laboured on the gold-fields, but the majority engaged in agricultural pursuits either as station labour, or as tenant farmers growing vegetables, maize and tobacco.

(Interestingly, the tobacco was used by farmers to make sheep dip. Tobacco was displaced by Coopers arsenic sheep dip in the 1890s and the price of tobacco fell.)

Much of the grazing and cropping land of the Riverina was cleared by organised gangs of Chinese who competed for contracts to ring-bark and clear land. Station owners and managers considered Chinese contractors to be trustworthy and competent in carrying out their contracts. Some owners declared this to be in contrast to European workmen who seemed keener to "collect rations and clear out."

Most Chinese migrants came from the coastal provinces of south-east China, the region around Canton and Hong Kong. This region was densely populated, opposed to the impositions of the

Manchu government and had significant exposure to European contact. These were what Dr McGowan described as "push factors" and produced a population of young men keen to migrate to "lands of opportunity." The tradition of migration was well established before the first migrants embarked for Australia. Earlier waves had gone to south-east Asia and the Americas. Some spoke English, probably having been educated in Christian mission schools in China.

Between jobs, the Chinese lived in "camps" in the regional towns of the Riverina including Narrandera, Deniliquin, Junee, Cootamundra, Gundagai, Tumut and Adelong as well as Wagga Wagga and Albury. In the smaller towns as many as half of the adult male population was Chinese.

Central to the camp life was the temple and often associated with it, the "lodge" which was a form of benevolent society, but also the centre for cultural festivals and celebrations. The lodge appears to have had overtones of the secret societies that permeated Chinese provinces opposed to the Manchu dynasty. Camps also had gambling dens, brothels and places where opium was smoked. Opium was not illegal.

By and large, camps were law abiding, but their activities were often criticised in the press. Claims were made that women in the camps, almost all European, were prostitutes and that European youth were encouraged to gamble and to buy "sly grog." Chinese were sometimes seen as "easy targets" by the police, but generally received very fair treatment in the courts.

Chinese stores began in the camps and catered for the needs of the inhabitants. Soon however, they increased their range of goods to include items sought by the European townsfolk. The stores moved from the camps to the commercial centre of the town and as decades passed became the backbone of commercial activity in the rural towns of the Riverina. The Chinese store-keepers were seen as honest, obliging and community minded. Advertisements in local newspapers showed the wide range of goods and competitive nature of their pricing.

Racism that had fluctuated throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century became more pronounced in the 1880s. In 1888, a crippling tax of £100 was placed on Chinese entering NSW. This had particular implications for Chinese residing in the Riverina because many had business and social connections across the border in north-east Victoria. Tax evaders were convicted and imprisoned in the Albury gaol. The poll-tax was discontinued at Federation but was "replaced" by the Immigration Restriction Act (1901). This made it difficult for Chinese to visit China where many had family, because they were subject to the Dictation Test on their return, a test they were unlikely to pass. Chinese

migration to Australia virtually stopped and numbers in the Riverina declined as older men died and children of migrants merged into the wider Australian society.

Today the evidence of the presence and influence of Chinese migration to pre Federation and early Federation Riverina is found in the pioneer cemeteries of regional cities and towns and in the names of prominent local families.

A comprehensive history of the Chinese in the Riverina is contained in the companion Catalogue to the "Tracking the Dragon" Exhibition. It is available at the LibraryMuseum at a cost of \$35.

#### **MORE NOTES FROM THE RIVER WALK**

##### **Albury Swim Centre**

The first swimming pool on this site was built in 1929 replacing an earlier pool near the corner of Creek and Stanley Streets. There was a smaller wading pool and the surrounds were grassed and floodlit at night.

In 1938, the pool was tiled, a chlorination plant installed and new changing rooms built. These improvements cost £9,000. Another upgrade occurred in the mid-1970s.

A major re-construction occurred in 1992/3 with the following features: a heated pool, a water-slide, a kiosk and BBQ area. There are amenities for the disabled and swim accessories. The new facility was named the Albury Swim Centre and was reopened by Ian Glachan MP, Member for Albury, on 7 March 1993. Alderman A J McLeish was the mayor.

##### **Paddle-steamer Wharf**

Albury was the highest point reached by paddle-steamers on the Murray. The first steamer, the PS *Albury*, owned by Francis Cadell and skippered by Captain George Johnston arrived on 2 October 1855. Captain Johnston had brought his craft 2,100 km from Goolwa at the Murray mouth to Albury; a formidable achievement. The citizens of Albury and district presented him with a bag of 100 sovereigns.

A suitable celebration was prepared for the momentous day. A large marquee was erected near the Hovell Tree and a band engaged. A bullock was roasted on a spit and a large pudding prepared for the feast. It was reported 200 people paid £5, a great deal of money in 1855, to attend the banquet. But they were disappointed in the meal, neither the meat nor the pudding were cooked properly. The music and an adequate supply of alcoholic beverages did compensate somewhat.

There is some dispute about the reason for the feast. Dr Andrews says the feast was to celebrate the abolition of border customs duties on 1 November, whereas Ian Mudie says it was to celebrate the arrival of the PS *Albury* on 2 October.

River traffic was subject to fluctuating river levels. Melting snows raised the levels to their highest in October and November making navigation easy, however by the end of summer low water exposed snags and sandbars.

The railway from Melbourne to Echuca was completed in 1864 turning Echuca into a major river port. Goods could be carried from Albury to Echuca by river then by rail to Melbourne. It was a faster, cheaper and more reliable service.

A paddle-steamer, PS *Cumberoona*, was built in 1866 at Echuca for the Albury Steam Navigation Company. Principals in the company included W N M Edmondson, George Day, Kenneth McLennan and J T Fallon, all prominent local businessmen.

The *Cumberoona* was engaged in the lively river boat trade between Albury and Echuca but was sold in 1873, the year the railway reached Wodonga.

In 1870 the NSW Parliament approved a sum of £1,000 for the construction of a wharf at Albury. Contractors were Messrs Hamlin & Simpson. The first pile was driven on 24 January 1871 with the structure being completed by May the same year.

The structure lacked a crane, making the facility almost useless unless the river level happened to be at the optimum height. The NSW government eventually responded to criticism and a suitable crane was installed on 22 November 1871.

The river trade however was doomed. The railway from Melbourne reached Wodonga two years later and offered a direct and faster transport option.

##### **Robert Brown's Hut**

Robert Brown was an Irishman. He arrived at the Crossing Place with his brother-in-law Mr Aime Huon in late 1836. Huon crossed the river and went on to the Wodonga Run, but advised Brown to stay and look at prospects for business. Brown opened a store supplying travellers with food and essentials.

Brown built himself a slab and bark hut and planted a vegetable garden.

A year later, sensing a need, Brown established an 'accommodation house' and obtained a liquor licence from Yass. He also owned the ferry service across the river after buying the dugout from James Gullifer. (See Punt)

Brown also fenced an area of five acres on the spit of land where the Canoe Club building now stands and planted maize. Townsend marked the fenced paddock on his 1839 survey map.

Shortly after Brown built his hut and store, a blacksmith named Barrett set up a smithy on the river bank a short distance away. There were also a number of travellers residing in tents around the hut and store.

In April 1839, Robert Brown became the first Albury resident to entertain vice-royalty when Lady Jane Franklin, wife of the governor of Van Diemen's Land, arrived on her journey from Melbourne to Yass. Her party camped on the bank of the river for four days before moving on. Lady Franklin, commented of the fine crop of maize Brown was growing.

In 1841 Brown's sister and father, Edward, arrived in Albury. His sister later married Charles Huon. Brown himself married Miss Ann Crowe at Campbelltown in 1842, the same year he built the Hume Inn on a crown grant near the corner of Hume Street and Wodonga Place.

In 1845 Robert Brown went farming at *Collendina* near Corowa, with Edward Crisp taking over the Hume Inn. Edward Brown, Robert's father bought Barrett's smithy and stayed on to work it for several years before he too moved to *Collendina*. Robert Brown died in 1879.

A plaque honouring Robert Brown was placed near the now-demolished kiosk in 1956. Council stored it away when the kiosk went. A Brown descendant from Victoria checked on it as he travelled through and asked that it be replaced. Council put it near the *Cumberoona* berth so that it would be seen.

A 2010 Albury & District Historical Society sponsored a land survey of the Murray riverfront, using Townsend's 1839 map, and located the likely site of Robert Brown's hut and store. It is between the roadway on the western edge of Hovell Tree Park and the cycle/walking path, and is partially covered by a City Council Pump Station.

### **Punt**

James Gullifer began the first ferry service using a dugout canoe. Gullifer was a stockman who had come with William Wyse in 1835, bringing cattle for Charles Ebdens station at *Mungabareena*. Gullifer stretched a rawhide rope across the river and employed an Aboriginal named Merriman to ferry passengers across the river. It was located at the end of Hume Street.

Soon after it began, Robert Brown purchased the business for £10 and continued to run it with Merriman in charge until 1844 when the dugout was replaced by a log punt. The punt, capable of carrying a horse and dray across the river, was located at the end of Hovell Street which at that time extended west of Wodonga Place to the river. Travellers were charged a hefty toll, as

much as £1, to cross the river.

When Robert Brown moved away, Edward Crisp took over the Hume Inn and the nearby punt. Crisp lowered the fees to sixteen shillings, but this price was still high. A bridge across the river was inevitable.

The *Border Post*, in 1858, reported a new site for the punt at the "end of Wodonga Street". This would place it at the site of the first Union Bridge that opened in 1861 removing the need for a punt.

The Aboriginal punt operator Merriman was a colourful character. He was suspected of being a leader of the resistance to European settlement and as being the instigator of an attack on stockmen near Benalla known as the Faithful Massacre. It was also said he was a cannibal and particularly fond of Chinamen. But he was highly regarded as a ferryman, especially in times of flood when he provided the only link between settlers north and south of the river.



**MacRobertson Medal, one of 30 presented to competitors who completed the London to Melbourne Air Race in 1934. It, and many other items of Uiver memorabilia, are to be presented to the Albury City Collection by Mr Johan Domenie during his visit.**

Photo J Domenie

### **ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

**The AGM is to be held on Wednesday 13 July 2011 at the Commercial Club Dean Street commencing at 7.30 p.m.**

**Nomination forms for positions of President, Senior & Junior Vice-presidents, Secretary, Treasurer, Minute Secretary and six Committee members are available from the Secretary**