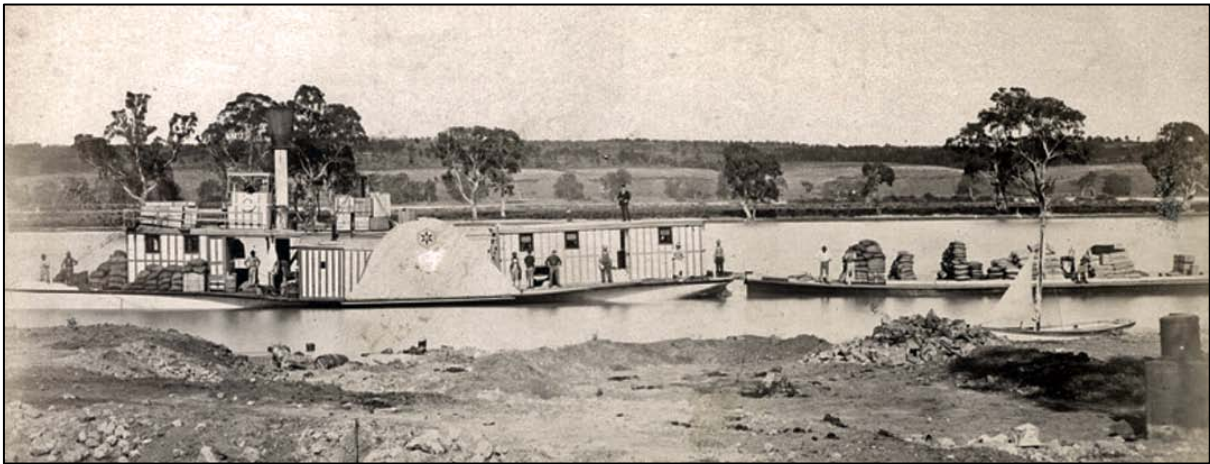


PS Cumberoona

Greg Ryan

Albury was first reached by water when *PS Albury* arrived on October 2, 1855. The bank was crowded with townspeople for the occasion and the Murray River quickly became a highway for passengers and produce to and from Albury.

In July 1866, the steamer *Cumberoona* was built at Echuca for the Albury Steam Navigation Company. Four one-time Mayors of Albury, William M N Edmondson, James T Fallon, George Day and Kenneth McLennan were shareholders.



PS Cumberoona with a barge in tow

She was built by George Linklater of Echuca (born Aberdeen, Scotland), an iron hulled, side paddle vessel, 108 feet (33.2 m) long, weighing 142 tons and designed to carry 75 tons, driven by a pair of engines of eighty-horse power, by Tennant, of Leith, Scotland, fitted by Messrs McCall & Black, Melbourne, who also constructed her boiler.

Her maiden voyage from Echuca to Albury in July did not go as planned - the vessel hit a snag and sank. It was reported that "The forward cabin and portion of the deck are out of water, but the aft saloon is submerged, and there is about three feet of water in it." Repairs had the *Cumberoona* back on the water and she finally arrived in Albury on August 23, 1866 with Captain James Mace at the helm and a public holiday was proclaimed in celebration.

However her speed got the *Cumberoona* into trouble in October 1869 - with a barge in tow, she collided with the *Wahgunyah* while trying to overtake in a narrow part of the Moira Lakes near Barmah. George Skinner, a young man steering the barge, was thrown overboard and drowned. Captain Mace was found culpable and had his master's certificate suspended for 12 months. In 1871, Mace became proprietor of the Star Hotel Echuca. Other masters of the *Cumberoona* included Edward Barnes and Gus Pierce.

A wharf at Albury was completed in May 1871. However, in May 1878, the *Sydney Mail* reported that "Since the opening of the railway few steamers come above Howlong and the Albury wharf, useless and deserted, is quietly rotting away." The wharf remained a sad relic of the 'Port of Albury' until it was finally demolished in 1896.

The river trade had peaked in the early 1870s, but rail links to Echuca (1864), Wodonga (1873) and Albury (from Sydney in 1881) saw a rapid decline in river trade. The *Albury*

Banner of November 21, 1874 reported that "The railway has driven steamers from the Murray." By the 1890s, river trade as far as Albury had all but ceased.

After plying the river trade for over 20 years, the *Cumberoona* was heading up the Darling in June 1889 loaded with flour and woolpacks when she hit rocks at Christmas Rocks, about 40 miles from Wilcannia and sank. It was reported that just her funnel was out of the water. After efforts to refloat her failed, she was abandoned until in February 1892 and after complaints from skippers of other vessels about her blocking the river, the wreck was blown up with dynamite. The remains of the *Cumberoona* are still buried at Christmas Rocks.