

# Construction of Hume Dam 1919-1936

## Part 11 – The End is Nigh

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One hundred years have now passed since the massive undertaking of damming the Murray began. This series of articles has only briefly touched on the many aspects from planning through to completion.



August 1947, the lake is almost full and little evidence of construction activity remains.

Photo: State Library of Victoria

One aspect not well known is the problems caused by the rotting vegetation as the weir filled. For more than a decade, downstream users complained of the putrid taste and smell of their water. The cement, from years of pressure cleaning the concrete conveyor belts and form work would not have assisted either.

For all this, the benefits, both social and economic, that communities, users, irrigators and the like along the 2200 kilometres of the river have enjoyed can only be described as immense.

Much of 1936 was used to clear up the site, including the villages. Three months before Governor-General Lord Gowrie symbolically opened a valve on November 23, 1936 signifying the dam's completion, an extensive auction sale took place. It was organised by JH Curnow & Son Melbourne in association with JB Garnsey and AT Jones & Co Albury. Over 3,000 lots were offered over six days. Items included locomotives trucks and rails, electric motors,

generators, stone crushers, steam rollers, lorries, stores, buildings, houses, boilers and even an automatic telephone exchange.

Some of the facts:

- When completed, Hume Dam ranked as the second largest in the world behind the Elephant Butte Dam on the Rio Grande in Texas.
- A total of 413,000 cubic metres of concrete was used. This included 65,000 in the Victorian core wall and 5,583 in Bethanga Bridge construction.
- Nearly 3 million cubic metres of earthworks were utilised.
- Land acquired – Victoria 87,268 acres (35,316 hectares). NSW 15,582 acres (6,305 hectares).
- Capacity - Originally 1,250,000 acre feet (1,522 gigalitres), later raised to 3,005 gigalitres.
- Workforce varied – 1,200 men during excavation phase.
- Valves first operated February 1, 1929.
- Dam first crested October 28, 1934.
- Cost – *Albury Daily News*, November 29, 1919 “Approximately £1.6 million.”  
*Albury Banner*, November 27, 1936 “£5.55 million.”
- Catchment Area – 15,300 square kilometres.
- Electricity generated at Council’s Mungabareena power plant was considered for Hume Dam construction but the capacity was less than half of what was required.