The Port of Albury

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To much rejoicing, Albury was reached by the paddlesteamer *Albury* on October 2, 1855. The bank was crowded with people waiting to acclaim Captain George Johnson who had at last linked Albury with the 'outside.'

Recognition of Albury as a port came in 1856 and the *Border Post* ran a regular column of "Shipping Intelligence," the comings and goings of steamers, moving thousands of tons of goods – wheat, wool and wine. In 1856 the value of merchandise from Adelaide to Albury by steamer was said to exceed £1,000,000.

For twenty hectic years the river provided a 'highway' for the transport of the produce of the Albury district to markets at home and abroad and brought great prosperity to the region.

Until the Albury wharf was built in 1871, cargoes were transferred by swinging them by crane between the boat and the bank. In July 1870 the colonial government granted £1000 for construction of a wharf at Albury. Contractors completed the wharf in May 1871 with a 160ft (just under 50m) frontage to the river. A five-ton crane was completed by November 1871.

An 1880s view of the Murray River from Western Hill. Albury's wharf and crane is sited just downstream of where an extension of Hume Street reaches the river. The Hovell Tree is centre left.

The *Border Post* reported in August 1866 that "Six wrecks on the Murray have taken place in about the same number of weeks." Snags were a threat to navigation and 'snagging' the river an expensive operation. In 1857 the Victorian Government "intended to expend £23,000 in the removal of snags."

The river trade peaked in the early 1870s, but rail links from Melbourne to Echuca (1864), Wodonga (1873) and Albury (from Sydney, 1881) saw a rapid decline in the river trade. The *Albury Banner* in November 1874 reported that "The railway has driven steamers from the Murray."

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 until it was finally demolished in 1896.

By the 1890s, river trade to Albury had all but ceased. In July 1893, the *Lancashire Lass* with a barge in tow, was the first cargo steamer for almost ten years to reach Albury. The river was badly silted and at Howlong, to get under the bridge, her wheel house, funnel and deck houses had to be dismantled and cargo from the barge added to settle the steamer deeper in the water.

The 'Port of Albury' soon became a memory.

Read more about the river trade to Albury on our website at
https://alburyhistory.org.au/resources/history-topics/