

ORBOST HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.



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NEWSLETTER

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A BRIEF HISTORY OF ORBOST

(Transcribed from a project by Pauline Wilkinson)

The earliest discovery of the Orbost district, so far as is known, was made by the Imlay Brothers about the year 1842. In that year, the south-eastern corner of New South Wales experienced a severe drought and the Imlay Bros, previously taken a large area of land around Eden and Pambula, were in need of grass for their cattle. They decided to travel south keeping to the coastal country. They eventually reached the Brodribb River, where they decided to set up the cattle run. They had brought with them about 800 head of cattle but the Aborigines were very hostile, spearing the cattle and a stockman was also speared in the arm, so Imlay decided to get out and leave the country to the Aboriginal people.



Orbost's Main Street 1889 – Temples Store (on left), Club Hotel (on right)

He accordingly moved his cattle back to Eden, but some were left behind and years afterwards the McLeods, who afterwards took up the Orbost Station found some of Imlay's cattle running wild in the bush.

McLeod and Raymond actually were the first white men to discover the lower reaches of the Snowy River. They also came from the Monaro district of New South Wales somewhere about the year 1845. They were on the lookout for good grazing land, and had heard from the blacks of good land at the mouth of the Snowy River. They came by Eden and Genoa where a small settlement had been made a few years earlier and eventually arrived on top of Mount Raymond, overlooking the Marlo plains to the south and the Snowy River flats to the west. Both areas as seen from the top of the mountain looked very promising, so they decided to spin a coin for first pick. Raymond won and chose the Marlo plains, which on closer inspection proved worthless, being sandy coastal country carrying very little grass. McLeod of course had to take the Snowy River flats, which were most fertile. He straight away went back to Monaro, got a mob of cattle together and persuaded his brother and some stockmen to accompany him. He travelled again to the lower reaches of the Snowy and set up a cattle station, which he named Orbost after the village in the Isle of Skye where the McLeods originally came from.



Orbost Station Homestead 1889

The McLeods carried on the Orbost Station for several years driving their fat bullocks to Melbourne for sale, which was a terrible journey in those days, with no roads or other civilized amenities. The journey took upwards of a month to accomplish. Fortunately, in those days there was generally plenty of feed on the way for the cattle so they usually arrived in good condition. During the McLeod's lease of Orbost the Aborigines were very numerous and somewhat hostile. One day shortly after the McLeods' arrival, while the men were out on the run, the blacks came to the hut and murdered the cook, afterwards ransacking the hut and setting fire to it. When the white men came home they found their murdered cook, and their first thoughts were of revenge. Accordingly, they set out for Buchan and other neighbouring stations and collected all the white men they could find, with the object of teaching the Aborigines a lesson. The Aborigines, by this time, had moved down the river to what is now known as the Devil's Backbone near Marlo. The whites caught up with them there and commenced shooting. Of course, the blacks had no chance. A number of them were killed but some escaped by swimming the river. Others crept into the bush. Afterwards the McLeods found two small boys in the long grass. Their mother had thrown them away in her

haste to escape the white men's guns. These two boys were named Harry and Charlie, and grew up on the station. Harry, whose Aboriginal name was Derra Mungie was a noted buckjumper and bush rider and a smart man with stock. When Sir William Clarke took over the Orbost station in about 1870, Harry was getting on in years and had worked all his life on the station, so Sir William pensioned him off, giving him and his lubra a hut for life and full rations and tobacco. Sir William Clarke (there is a street in Orbost named after him) cut the station up into farms and sold the station about 1898. The best land at Newmerella brought up to £20 per acre, a record for the district at that time. About 1894 the first selectors were beginning to arrive in the district, and taking up land for farming. There was no near market for their produce and no roads or railways. But they made a living by breeding cattle and pigs. The pigs were fed on maize. The fat pigs were driven to Bairnsdale to the rail-head and trucked to Melbourne. Later on the butter factory was established, and by dairying and pig-raising the struggling settlers were able to carry on more or less successfully but times were hard in those days. About this time, schooners were trading between Melbourne and Marlo, at the mouth of the Snowy River, carrying the necessary goods for the small settlement, and for back-loading taking the settlers' maize to market. When the bar at the mouth of the river was closed, as it often was, horse and bullock teams carried goods to and from Cuninghame, now Lakes Entrance, over perhaps the worst roads in the State. This route, too, was often blocked by the opening of the sandbar at the mouth of Lake Tyers, where the road was on the beach. Mails and passengers were transported daily between Cuninghame and Orbost by horse coach. At one period two different firms ran coaches and competed for the few passengers then travelling.



Orbost Club Hotel 1889 – Thomas J P McGuire Prop.

The township began to take shape about 1885. Blacklock's general store was the first to operate, but was soon followed by other general stores. Tom McGuire opened the first hotel, a wooden building on the site of the present Club Hotel. Orbost was not the earliest settlement in the Orbost Shire. The districts of Bendoc and Bonang were settled from New South Wales about the same time as McLeod discovered Orbost in 1845. In 1860 the Stirling family selected land at Marlo. They also held large areas on the western side of the river at Corringale, and the runs east of the Brodribb River. About this time the Roadknight family also settled on Ewing's Marsh on what is now known as the Old Station.

This is a brief history of settlement in this Shire. Please note that all information may not be entirely accurate.