NEWSLETTER

MAY, 2006

'Snowy River Mail', Wednesday, November 24, 1954:

Convict First White Settler In Orbost District?

The remains of a hut, stockyards and a few head of cattle, running wild in the bush, together with pumpkin pines growing on land out Bete Bolong way giving rise to the belief that the first white settler in the Orbost district was possibly a convict who had escaped from his master and made the long journey down from the Monaro country of New South Wales.

Mr R. R. Johnston, of Orbost, tells this interesting fact in a letter to the Editor, describing how certain place names in the Orbost district were derived. He writes:

It might be of interest to your many readers to know how certain place names in the Orbost district were arrived at. There is often an interesting story behind some of these names. My information is second hand. It has been handed down from former old residents of the district and may not be authentic in every detail. If not, I would welcome correction.

NAMING OF ORBOST

In the first place, the name Orbost itself was given by the McLeod Bros, the first white people to settle in this district. They came originally from the Isle of Skye, on the west coast of Scotland, and Orbost was the name of the village in which they lived.

Orbost Township in the 1880s

STREET NAMES OF ORBOST

The streets of Orbost were named by a committee of three very early residents of this district, who were appointed by a public meeting called for the purpose. They were the late Mr Stapley, Mr D. R. Morris and Mr James Nixon (the original Nixon great grandfather of the young folk of present day).

These gentlemen gave the streets names commemorating prominent men of that period such as Thackeray, Ruskin and Tennyson after authors and poets; Stanley and Livingstone after well known explorers.

Wolseley and Gordon were soldiers of some renown, and of course, Gordon could have been the well known poet.

Gladstone was the great Liberal Prime Minister of England.

Boundary Road was the boundary of the town area at that particular time, and Forest Road was the road between the township and the forest. By the look of it today, it has not improved much in the meantime!

TEN ACRES PRESENTED FOR A SHOWGROUND

A very early photo of McLeod Street

McLeod Street was, of course, named after the McLeods, the original holders of the Orbost station.

Clarke Street derived its name from Sir William Clarke who bought the station from McLeod Bros. Sir William was a very fine man and noted for his philanthropic actions. He finally cut up and sold the Orbost station and presented 10 acres of land to the people of Orbost for a show and recreation ground. He also made other bequests of land to different organisations. Over the years the people of Orbost seem to have lost control of that same land. It appears another case case of the dog and the bone!

Messrs Archie and Donald Munro carried on a boot making and repairing business in the street of that name in the early days. They were both fine citizens and good public men.

Donald Munro was a councillor for many years.

Lochiel Street adjoined the property of the late Hon. James Cameron, now Lochiel Park.

The old bush road that Jennings Carmichael wrote about in her poem of that name was the road leading from the township to the station homestead, now occupied by Mr. Phil Robinson, and would take in McLeod Street and part of Forest Road.
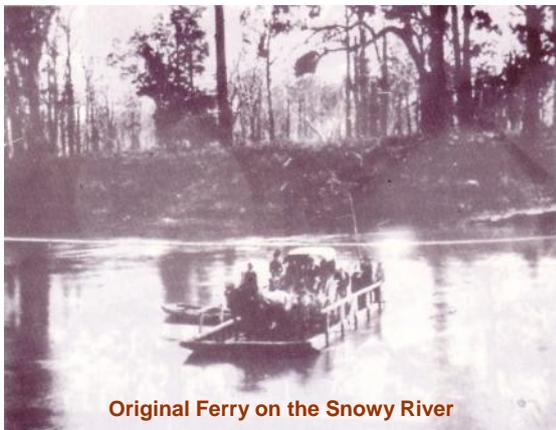
THE SNOWY RIVER

The Snowy River received its name in N.S.W. where it rises in the Snowy Mountains. There is nothing snowy about the river here, but one day it will be the most famous river in Australia.

Original Ferry on the Snowy River

The Brodribb River was, I believe, named after a Mr. Brodribb, one of the earliest surveyors in these parts.

ABORIGINAL ORIGIN

Quite a number of our place names are of aboriginal origin. The aborigines bestowed names on certain localities, where some prominent feature was evident, such as Marlo, the place where they obtained the white pipe clay used in painting their bodies in their tribal ceremonies.

Another well known name in this district means plenty of eels. Newmerella and Bete Bolong are black names, so are Curlip, Coringle, Wat Wat, and many others.

The name Jarrahmond has an interesting origin. The land now occupied by the Trewin family was originally selected by Mr Stapley and he came here from Western Australia, the home of the Jarrah timber. When he saw the tall, straight mahogany trees growing on the hill or mound he called the property Jarrahmond, being of the mistaken opinion that the trees were Jarrah.

All the streets above Boundary Road were named in recent years. They were not part of the original surveyed township, but were incorporated in later years as subdivisions of the James estate and the Perry Estate.

Turning to creeks, I haven't any idea how Jones, Young, Major's and Wall Creeks were named, but Fat Cow received its name from the fact that during a hard winter, in the days of the station, fat cattle for killing were very scarce.

Pannikin Creek: McLeod's men were mustering cattle in the vicinity and found a rusty tin pannikin hanging in the fork of a sapling. Goodness knows how it got there. It could have been left behind by the Imlays when they brought cattle through from Eden in the very early days in an attempt to establish a cattle station in this district, but were turned back by the blacks.

Raymond Creek, Mt Raymond and Raymond Street were named after Raymond, who, with McLeod, is generally considered to be the discoverer of the Orbost district.

Raymond and McLeod set out from the Monaro district in search of good grazing country, and, after travelling through very rough country and not finding much to interest them they eventually arrived at the top of Mt. Raymond. Stretching before their eyes were the fertile Snowy River flats and to the left the Marlo plains, which at that distance looked green and full of promise, so they decided there and then to toss a coin for first pick of the land. Raymond won and chose the Marlo plains. On closer inspection he found the plains to be poor coastal country carrying stunted heath and useless for cattle raising, so he did not go on with it. Raymond afterwards took up large areas of land in the Stratford district and was a noted figure in the early days of that locality.

McLeod went back to Monaro and with his brother, Norman and some stockmen, brought a mob of cattle through and established what was later known as Orbost station.

W.R. Creek: A tree was found growing on the creek with the initials "W. R." cut into the bark. The initials stood for William Roadknight, who, at that time, held Ewing's Marsh and practically all the country between Lakes Entrance and Snowy River.

The Roadknights and Stirlings were related and were very early settlers in East Gippsland. The Stirlings settled at Marlo.
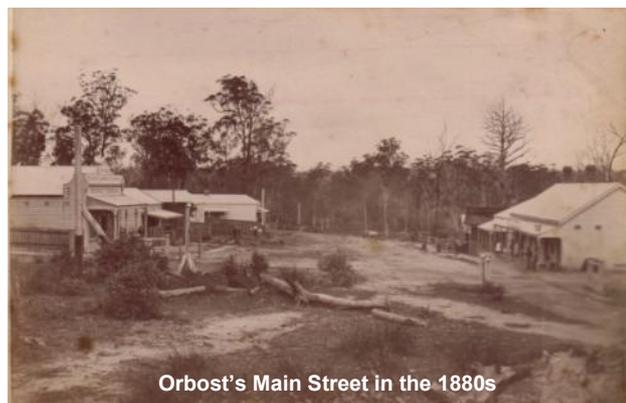
Simpson's Creek: A man by name of Simpson, employed on the station, camped on this creek for a time.

Hospital Creek: In the days of the cattle station all cattle had to be driven to Melbourne for sale and

Jonson's Halfway House at Hospital Creek

the journey took the best part of a month. The bullocks were fat when they left Orbost and, as there was generally plenty of grass on the way, the cattle usually arrived in good condition. On one of the annual trips to Melbourne with the fats, the mob camped for the night on this particular creek. On setting out the next morning one of the stockman's horses fell on him and broke his leg. There were no doctors or hospitals in those far off days, and the unfortunate fellow just had to stay where he was. The "boss" left a tent and a man to look after him until the leg healed sufficiently for him to be moved, so the creek came to be known as Hospital Creek.

In the early days Bete Bolong South was known at Pumpkin Point, and it came by that name in a curious way. When white men first arrived in the district they found pumpkins growing on a point of land between what is now the main Bete Bolong drain and the Snowy River. On the hill opposite were the remains of a hut and yards. Who occupied the hut no one will ever know, but who ever he was, he was certainly the first person to settle in the district. It was thought that he was a convict escaped from the Monaro country. The squatters at that time employed ticket-of-leave men on the stations and it is surmised one had evidently taken a few head of cattle, a horse or two and a few seeds with him. Whatever became of him whether he was killed by the blacks, or died of natural causes, is not known, but the McLeod's found a few head of wild cattle in the bush not far from that locality. Very likely they were the descendant's of that done pioneer's stock.

Orbost's Main Street in the 1880s

OLD PUMP HOUSE

Flood levels over many years have been recorded on the Old Pump House located in a paddock near the old Orbost Butter Factory just off Forest Road, Orbost. This property is currently owned by Lachlan Macalister.

Charlie Lay indicates the height of the 1971 flood on the Old Pump House

Detail of information on the Old Pump House

SNOWY RIVER FLOOD MARKER

A symbolic flood marker was installed in Forest Park, Orbost, in May 2001. It was a combined effort by Orbost Rotary Club, the Women of the Snowy River group and the Bureau of Meteorology. The marker has been carved from a single slab of ironbark and records the river heights of floods during the past 100 years. The base is a carved eucalypt burl depicting several platypuses. The marker which took three years to complete includes photographs and historic information recorded on stainless steel plaques.

Information and photographs provided by Lachlan and Beryl Macalister and Debbie Hall