

Colebrook, Tasmania

Recently a friend of Jan Rathbun's, who had been raised in Tasmania and later married an American, returned with her husband to her home state of Australia for a visit. While there, they made a side trip to a small community some 35 miles northwest of the capitol city of Hobart named Colebrook, where they collected several pages of printed material, among which was an email address of a lady who wanted any historical information for their monthly historical newsletter.

As it is probable that some readers don't know where Tasmania is located, I will attempt to tell you without the aid of a map. The island continent of Australia is located at the eastern end of the Indian Ocean and directly south of the island nation of Indonesia and the large island of New Guinea. To the east, the Tasman Sea, a part of the South Pacific Ocean, bathes its shore, while to the south lies the Southern Ocean, which is the body of water surrounding Antarctica. In a straight line due south, Tasmania lies only some 1,500 miles from the icy shores of that frozen continent. In size, (26,178 square miles) it is about the same as West Virginia. Tasmania lies about 150 miles southeast of the state of Victoria, the mainland's southernmost state, separated by a body of water called the Bass Strait, which contains several groups of islands. Tasmania is one of the world's most rugged islands and has a wide variety of physical characteristics ranging from 5,305-foot Mt. Ossa to broad valleys. The capitol, Hobart, has a population about that of Meriden (50,000 – 60,000). Farming and the exportation of agricultural products account for much of the state's income. One product that almost all of us are familiar with that originated in Tasmania is the bright green apple known as "Granny Smith". In the late nineteenth century, a crate of these apples was found on a dock in Melbourne Australia. There was nothing on the container to indicate where the contents came from, except that it had come in with a shipment of produce from Tasmania. The cooking and keeping qualities of this strain of apple made it an instant success. Today it is grown in many of the apple-producing regions of the world.

And now for our initial contact with Colebrook, Tasmania: I had sent a short informational blurb to the email address found on the material I had been given telling a little about us, and indicating that we would like to establish contact with our sister town "down under". Within a matter of hours, I received a short message from a lady named Lynette Munnings accompanied by a really beautiful photo showing a broad, mostly grassy valley with forested mountains in the distance. Centered in the photo is a small community consisting of one highway and a railroad track. At the far side of the valley a body of water can be seen which was identified as that behind Craighourne Dam. This is the physical setting of Colebrook, Tasmania. Before the day was out, another message came in, which I will pass on, as it is very interesting.

"It was lovely to receive your email and congratulations on your 225th anniversary. Colebrook, Tasmania is not as old. The Mercury newspaper asked people to write in 'Why I Live Where I Live' a few years back, and my contribution was printed. I will copy what I wrote at the time, as it does have a bit of history."

"Colebrook was named Jerusalem sometime before 1824 by Jorgen Jorgenson, a district constable. While searching for stock thieves, the surrounding seven hills reminded him that Jerusalem, in Israel, was surrounded by seven hills. People after 1834 called the town Colebrook Dale. It was officially named Colebrook in 1894.

Colebrook has many historic buildings, including St. Patrick's Roman Catholic Church, which overlooks the town and was built in 1856. The contract was signed for the erection of St. James Anglican Church on October 2, 1882. Hardwick Mill was working in 1871, but by the turn of the century had converted to a private residence and still is today.

The police building is also a private residence today and still contains two cells. Nichols Store, Pineholme and the former hospital have also survived up to now, proving Colebrook is rich in historical content.

'The Chimneys', now a private home, was the residence of the district constable in March 1854. In July 1854, it became a convent until it closed shortly before the 1967 bush fires.

The town was almost completely destroyed by the fires on February 7, 1967, but has since been rebuilt. Many buildings were lost. One side of the street was virtually wiped out with only one building here and there taken on the opposite side. Sadly, one life was lost, along with the state school, post office, the Railway Hotel, the two shops and many homes. The loss of stock was horrific.

The convent was reopened until a new state school was built. That school closed in August 1986, and was relocated at Dodges Ferry. [I can't locate that community, but assume it is in the Hobart area, some 35 miles away.]

Craigbourne Dam was officially opened on November 17, 1986. This brought about the loss of Colebrook Park, a two-story Georgian sandstone house built in 1822. Two private homes were removed before the area was flooded. One remained a private home; the other became a golf club house. The dam has brought irrigation to many farmers and excellent fishing for many anglers.

Colebrook has lost a few facilities over the years. The postal service has become an agency open for two hours each week day, the school children travel to Campania for their education and the police station is at Richmond. [Campania is the next town 10 miles south; Richmond is 5 miles south of Campania.]

I remember traveling by train to work in 1964 but public transport has been reduced to a bus service one day every two weeks. Many people choose to live in Colebrook and travel to Hobart to work each day. The traveling time is 45 minutes. It is a pleasant drive.

The sports available in Colebrook are football, cricket, tennis, badminton, eight ball and darts.

Colebrook is a farming district and I am happy to live on a farm with my family. The air is fresh, the scenery is beautiful and the lifestyle is healthy. We've had good and bad years and worked hard, but we wouldn't change it for any other place.

A quiet walk down to Wallaby Rivulet or up to the waterhole filled from an underground spring rewards the patient observer with a glimpse of a platypus. Lots of birds live happily among the cattle, sheep, rabbits, wallabies and possums.

A visit to Colebrook shows a quiet, peaceful town that I love."

Lynette closed by stating that they really are not sure how Colebrook came to be named, but most believe it was because of the coal that was mined in the area, even though the spelling is different.

I will keep you up to date with this new contact with Colebrook, Tasmania.

Historic Bytes

Bob Grigg