

# Introduction

The whole of the Brisbane and Stanley River watersheds is famous as some of the best cattle fattening and dairying country in Queensland. Equally compelling images of the Valley are of rugged timbergetters driving timber jinkers, their toughened hands wielding axes and saws, and Lars Andersen managing his sawmills, building tramways and purchasing traction engines. Recollections of the timber industry, milking cows, lucerne hay, and the many facets of the Brisbane and Stanley rivers are firmly implanted in local minds.

Proximity to the capital has made the valley an attractive region for closer settlement. In recent years subdividers and young families have further confirmed the Valley's attractiveness, especially for commuters. The predominant themes of the region's development have been land alienation, livestock management, agricultural production, and the role of the Esk Shire Council in construction of roads and bridges to service landholders.

Land fertility and proximity to the capital have always generated strong demand for land in the region. German settlements were a feature from the 1850s; they particularly flourished after the 1870s when large numbers of Prussians seeking a stable economy settled in the areas now known as Tarampa, Lowood, Minden, Marburg, and Mount Beppo. Intensive agriculture followed and the timber and dairying industries prospered; land was selected rapidly after the opening of the railway to Esk in 1886, to Toogoolawah in 1904, and later beyond.

Government land resumption policies have had a continuing impact on the Brisbane Valley from the 1860s to the present, culminating in the Wivenhoe Dam development in the 1970s. Those policies have determined the extent and prosperity of the agricultural, livestock, and timber industries over the century and a half of settlement, as well as the social life of the Valley. The changing fortunes of landholders from the wealthy pastoralists of the 1840s to dairy farmers to sawmillers, have revolved full circle to the Wivenhoe Dam resumptions and the land subdivisions. These latter two recent developments have permanently altered the population and fortunes of southern sections of the Shire.

The Brisbane Valley towns developed to service the pastoral industry and later dairying and timber industries. All the towns north of Esk grew with the coming of the railway. Ironically Esk developed because of mining — the copper boom at Biarra in 1873. Patrick Clifford, formerly a storekeeper at Goodna, took up a Mineral Selection with friends, was unsuccessful, and quickly re-established a store where the coach route crossed Sandy Creek. Cressbrook was originally a private town operated by the McConnells in conjunction with Cressbrook station. By contrast Linville, between two huge hills, became a hive of activity with the opening of the railway in 1910 and the sawmill in 1912. It also supported the dairying industry when farms were opened for selection to timbergetters and soldier settlers.

Colinton, situated on Emu Creek, has always been a pastoral and dairying town. Named after the Balfours' home town near Edinburgh in Scotland, Colinton was the centre of a rich dairying area since the Moore's land was subdivided. It supported the Standard Dairy Company's condensed milk factory until 1920 when it was closed following the amalgamation of condensed milk factory companies in Australia led by the Nestle Company. Nestle's Toogoolawah condensed milk factory, the first of its type in Australia, underpinned the Toogoolawah economy for many years. The advent of home refrigeration meant the decline of the condensed milk industry. The dairy industry turned to alternative products, butter and cheese, manufactured at several co-operative factories in the Valley at Lowood and Esk.

Local Government areas were established under the *Divisional Boards Act of 1879*. When the members of Esk Divisional Board first met on 5 March 1880 their area of responsibility extended throughout the whole of the Brisbane and Stanley Rivers watersheds — east past Kilcoy to the D'Aguilar Range, west to include Crow's Nest, north to the dividing range between the Burnett and Brisbane Rivers, and south to Coominya and Perseverance but not including either Fernvale or Lowood. Their immediate problems were roads and bridges. Led by James H. McConnel they applied for a government loan for a bridge over Cressbrook Creek. The dominant considerations of Council until the 1950s were roads, bridges,

wandering stock, noxious weeds, reserves, public health, management of timber traffic on its roads, the Esk Hospital, public halls, and matters affecting the dairy factories. It was only in the 1960s that social welfare and sporting activities began to concern the Council. In the 1970s the main areas of council activity have been local employment, land subdivision policies, main roads upgrading and bridge reconstruction, environmental matters, building standards, and support of local community activities.

Public education facilities began in the 1860s with the establishment of Wivenhoe school. The Valley has had innumerable one-teacher schools, and also the youngest woman teacher at a one-teacher school in Queensland and one of the first school buses in the State, from Mount Stanley to Linville, in the late 1940s. Numerous high achievers – farm managers, businessmen, judges, a state governor, a Lilley medalist, and two Rhodes Scholars have graduated from schools in the region. The lack of state high schools in Queensland until the 1960s ensured that parents supported private schools in Ipswich.

In recent years the Council has turned its

interests to tourism in response to the huge Wivenhoe Dam development which attracts a growing number of visitors to the Shire. Whilst the dam has resulted in an upheaval among primary producers, residents and the Shire Council have turned it to their own advantage as a positive growth factor. The second tourism factor is the construction of the direct road over the D'Aguiar Range east of the dam to Brisbane via the Brisbane Forest Park, a road advocated intermittently since the 1840s. Likewise the road via Hampton and Perseverance has ensured the strong connection between Valley residents and Toowoomba since the first pastoralists came that way in the 1840s; it is now a tourist route from the Downs to Somerset Dam and the Sunshine Coast.

With the Esk Shire population at ten thousand it is one of the fastest growing Shires in the State with a Council budget of six million dollars. Today it offers an attractive lifestyle to young families and refugees from the city. While water, roads, bridges, agriculture, and fat cattle remain predominant preoccupations of the Shire Council and many residents, it is the recreational opportunities and proximity to Brisbane which continue to advance the popularity of the Shire.

Club Hotel and Ipswich Street gardens in flower at Esk. 1987.

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