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Highgate Hill

"One day there will be residences along this ridge." This remark has been accredited to Sir George Bowen, the first Governor of Queensland, as he rode along the crest of Highgate Hill almost sixty years ago. One is not surprised that his words should have come true, but that they have been borne out in so short a time. The path that Sir George's horse trampled on that early morning ride has been transformed into the wide and sweeping highway, Dornoch-Terrace, that stretches from the crest of Highgate Hill to the flats of West End, and on both sides it is bordered by some of the most beautiful residences in Brisbane. It is an unusually pretty drive, with a glorious view of the spreading city. Distant mountain ranges, softened in a delicate blue mist, limit one's vision to the west, while immediately below curls the stately Brisbane River.

First Settlers.

Probably the first man to make his home on Highgate Hill was the late Mr. Trimble, an officer in the Customs House, and his home in Julia Street is doing service to this day. The late Mr. and Mrs. George Wilson and their family of eight were the next to settle there on their arrival from Scotland in the Lady Bowen in 1864. The original homestead still stands at the top of Bellevue Street, next to the small reserve and lookout on Dornoch-Terrace. At that time, of course, South Brisbane was a matter of paddocks, some cleared, but for the most part still thick bush, especially the wooded slopes of Highgate Hill. The Wilson family made their way to the top of the hill, and the pleasant prospect of undulating country, with a pretty stream at their feet, was a final factor in their decision to settle there. However, if the site afforded a magnificent view of Brisbane, it certainly lacked every other convenience. The Wilsons made no grand entry into their new demesne. There were no roads to Highgate Hill, and the family trudged one after the other up the hill, following the merest outline of a track that rambled between the giant gum trees, Willing hands put together a makeshift humpy, that served until the permanent home was completed. In the following year the late Mr. and Mrs. Alexander McIntosh, with their family of eight boys and one girl, arrived on the scene, and built their first home level with Dornoch-terrace, but about 1888 built Kinauld, the present home, which is set off by a pretty garden.

Youthful Impressions.

MR. A. B. WILSON, one of the best known architects in Brisbane, now living in retirement in Thorn-street, Kangaroo Point, has always been an enthusiastic painter in oils and water colour, and many of his pictures decorate the walls of his home. Among his cherished possessions is a small painting he made while still a young lad, of Dart's sugar mill, on St. Lucia. The scene, which was painted from Dornoch-terrace, gives a slight glimpse of the bush that existed on Highgate Hill. Curiously enough, Mr. Hugh McIntosh, who was Chief Draughtsman in the Survey Office, also had a flair for sketching, and one of his early efforts depicts the same scene, but sketched from the river bank. Another sketch that is of considerable interest, is an impression of Dornoch-terrace, as Mr. M'Intosh saw it when a lad of about 13 years. The view, which was taken from the old home, looking towards West End, shows two or three old-fashioned houses surrounded by scrub, while a path that straggles down the centre of the sketch was the genesis of Dornoch-terrace. Mr. Wilson and Mr. McIntosh, boon companions in their boyhood days, recall pleasant memories of their visits to St. Lucia during the cotton picking season, for in those early days sugar cane and cotton growing were two thriving industries of the rich St. Lucia flats. Like most boys of their age, young Wilson and M'Intosh and their companions were always ready to do a little agreeable work that ensured plenty of fun and a little extra pocket money.

The Water Problem.

The chief problem to those who ventured beyond the town limits was the supply of fresh water, and the hardship of water carrying and the lack of a plentiful supply had proved a sore trial to the early home-builders. The usual practice was to sink a large hole, which, bricked in, formed an admirable container for rain water from the roof. Unfortunately, the roofs in those days consisted of shingles, and unless they were thoroughly dried and seasoned, the wood taint permeated the water, which resembled and tasted like poisonous tea. However, unpalatable as it was, it had to be drunk when fresh water was unobtainable. Another source of supply was from the water-holes, which ran through the late Mr. Edward Deighton's property, off Gladstone-road. Frequently it was necessary to remove the scum that formed on the surface, after which the water was strained and boiled before it was fit for drinking purposes. A spring in front of the late Mr. John Davidson's house in Boundary-street, where the Boundary Hotel is now built, afforded a permanent supply of water, and Mr. A. B. Wilson distinctly remembers his mother and a Highland lassie named Katie Campbell, who accompanied the Wilsons to the new land, as well as other members of the household, troop to the spring in Boundary-street with buckets, tubs, or any other handy container, and trudge back through paddocks, over gullies, and through bush with the precious water.

In 1889 the water problem was solved, not only for the residents of Highgate Hill, but for the greater portion of South Brisbane, when the reservoir was constructed near the corner of Gladstone-road and Dornoch-terrace. The reservoir, which has a capacity of 2,170,000 gallons, was built by the Brisbane Board of Waterworks at a cost of about £12,500. The earth removed was used in filling up the gullies at the back. It is interesting to note that Mr. T. H. Field, sen., who resides in West-street, for 21 years was turncock and caretaker of the reservoir and worked for the late Mr. Petrie, when the first water pipes were laid down in Brisbane. Another noteworthy fact is that at one stage it was contemplated erecting the South Brisbane fire station on the same site. Those were the days of the horse-drawn fire engines and the argument advanced in favour of that site, was that it would be easier for the horses to run down the hill to a fire than it would be to run up the hill.

Belle Vue Church.

AN unpretentious wooden church known as the Belle Vue Presbyterian Church, situated in Dornoch terrace, next to "Daar Lodge," the home of Mr. J. Thomson, did duty until a few years ago, when it began to shed its shingles, and was sold for removal. This church had an interesting history. In the early eighties the congregation of the Park Presbyterian Church in Glenelg-street, South Brisbane, was split into two factions on the question of the installation of an organ. With many of the older people, a vital principle was at stake, and the anti-organists carried their principles so far as to secede from the church, and thereafter conducted a separate church of their own about the site where the Vulture-street railway station now stands. From the records in the Queensland Presbytery office, the earliest mention of the new church was in the years 1883-1884, and it is assumed that the secession took place about that time. There was no regular minister for the first two or three years, and the next record of importance is that the Rev. James Carson was inducted in the Bellevue Church on August 30, 1885. When the South Coast railway was built, the church had to find a new home, and a site was selected on Dornoch-terrace, the building being designed by Mr. A. B. Wilson. In 1892 the church was blown down during a gale, and later was re-erected. At various times during its career the church remained vacant, but the names of Rev. W. Grant Forsyth, Rev. James McQueen, and Rev. M. Davies figure prominently in the records as having been in charge for long periods. The Rev. J. M. Stoope appeared to have been the last minister in 1911, and the church fell into disuse shortly after that year.

The cost of keeping two churches within close proximity to each other was too great for the parishioners, and besides the younger generation either was not acquainted or did not appreciate the principle that guided their fathers to establish their own church.

Sierra Madre

In 1839, James Warner, a surveyor from Sydney, made the earliest known survey of Highgate Hill, and its environs. He was so impressed with the peculiar formation of Highgate Hill, from which spurs ran in all directions that he named it Sierra Madre (Mother Mountain), out of compliment to his wife, who, it has been stated, was Spanish or Portuguese. Although the name Sierra Madre was indicated on the original plan, it was never adopted. It was left to the Wilson family to give Highgate Hill its present name, while the McIntosh family named Dornoch-terrace by way of association with their native Scotland.

A brick house, which stood many years ago near the site of the reservoir, was the home of the late Judge Shephard, and almost opposite, where Beaumont Flats now stand, on the edge of the hill, lived the late Judge Blakeney, father of the late Mr. W. T. Blakeney (Registrar-General), and on whose property the house was built. The old home was destroyed by fire many years ago. The late Mr. W. T. Blakeney himself lived in the street bearing his name, while alongside is Julia-street, named after his daughter. Mr. Simon Fraser, an auctioneer, who represented South Brisbane in Parliament, resided in Dornoch-terrace, where the old home, "Torbreck," still stands, although it has since been turned into flats. The late Mr. T. W. Fraser (Sheriff of Queensland), no relation of Mr. Simon Fraser, was the first to build in the street named after him, overlooking the river. His home is now occupied by Dr. Turner. Nearby is Sankey-street, named after Sergeant-Major Sankey, an English soldier, who was brought out to Queensland as an instructor. Mr. E. G. Schlenker was the first resident in Dauphin-terrace, having arrived there in August, 1883, immediately after his marriage. The only stone house on Dornoch-terrace is "Daar Lodge," the home of Mr. J. Thomson, originally built by the late Mr. Rumpf, who kept an hotel in South Brisbane. The late Mr. A. J. Thynne lived at "Thoonbah," in Hampstead-road, while near by, in Blakeney-street, Mr. J. Kerr built his home, subsequently occupied by the late Mr. John W. Hill (Town Clerk, South Brisbane). Baynes-street will always be a memorial to the well-known Baynes family. Messrs. Brydon and Jones, partners in a once well-known firm of that name, also lived on the slopes leading to Highgate Hill. After the death of Mr. J. M. Brydon, Mrs. Brydon, who was a cultured woman, conducted a private school in Hampstead-road. The house, which was named "Marley," subsequently became the home of the late Mr. Justice Chubb.

Historical Tit-bits.

A SENSATION was caused in High-gate Hill when the rumour got about that gold had been found. The late Mr. T. B. Stephens, M.L.C., sunk a shaft on his property near the corner of Gladstone-road and Gloucester-street in the hopes of finding a reef, and the undertaking was not abandoned until the shaft had been sunk to a depth of 50ft. Gold certainly had been found, but not in payable quantities. Years later the shaft was filled up, and a house now stands on the site. Gold is still to be found in Highgate Hill, but it is discernible only as colour in the quartz-bearing rocks that abound in the district. A little bit of early convict history is recalled by an excavation along the river bank between Dauphin-terrace and Boundary-street. The rusted remains of leg-irons found there indicated only too well the frequency of convicts, and it is understood that the excavation was used as a saw pit, where the convicts sawed the wood taken from Highgate Hill. The flat lands in the same locality, commonly known as Boyce's Flats, were always a popular sports ground. The year following the arrival of the McIntosh family, a group of about 30 Germans and Bavarians, together with their families, pitched their tents on Dornoch-terrace, between Dauphin-terrace and Gladstone-road. They were newly-arrived immigrants, and remained at the camp for about six months, when they dispersed. Another tent community was formed in the gullies between Dornoch-terrace and Vulture-street. This time, however, they were runaway sailors who had deserted ship, and lived in tents with their families. Eventually a number of them built homes, and in some cases their descendants are still living in the same locality, which, appropriately enough, had been called Sailors' Gully.

The Lookout.

The little reserve at the corner of Hampstead-road and Dornoch-terrace is one of the best vantage points of Brisbane. It is the highest point in South Brisbane, being 203ft. above sea level, and the look-out from the pavilion on this eminence is one of the finest. It has the double advantage of being easily accessible, and of being approached along Dornoch terrace, which, in itself, is a beautiful drive. Few visitors fail to visit this spot, for the glimpse of Brisbane obtained from it is an exhilarating sight. It was at this point that thousands of people gathered to see the Prince of Wales during his memorable visit to Brisbane. As with most suburbs of Brisbane, closer settlement coincided with the subdivision of estates during the '90's, but it was not until the advent of the electric trams on October 31, 1908, that the district showed signs of suburban importance.