**Essays on Mount Crosby - The Letterbook**

A lot of what we know about old Mount Crosby comes from the pages of the letterbook kept by the first Chief Engineer, Joseph Stewart. Although Joseph "reigned" from 1892 to 1919, only his first letter book remains, but, happily, it covers the formative years from 1892 to 1912.

The letterbook provides a copy of all correspondence sent from the Chief Engineer's office at the pumping station and, because the correspondence was written mostly without consideration of its future use as a reference, it is classically honest about happenings at the station.

Among its 1000 pages, the letterbook provides first-hand accounts of famous moments, such as the flooding of the station in 1893:

*I left the doors open to ease them, but round the back of the boiler house and between the end of the engine house and the coal shed the current ran like a mill race.*

But, as with many old things, it is the background details or incidental snippets in the letters that are often of most interest. For example:

*I would again draw your attention to the disgraceful means of lighting the boiler house and the engine room at this pumping station. Under the most favourable conditions, the men at night cannot see to do their work, and when the westerly winds are on it blows the lights out completely. The men are continually getting hurt through barrows upsetting wheeling coal and ashes.*

From this short paragraph we get an idea about the hours men worked, the way of lighting the pump station, the method of moving coal to the boiler furnaces, and whether the engineers accepted the conditions or thought it could be done better. All this in just one paragraph, which is why the letterbook's 1000 pages are such a treasure trove of information (though it can be jolly hard to read).

Col Hester