**Essays on Mount Crosby - Alexander Stewart**

Were it not for the decision of the Brisbane Board of Water Works to build their water supply scheme at Mount Crosby, our local history would have been longer in the way of rural pursuits and I think no small town would have emerged until the suburbs eventually crept up. It is likely to have been an unremarkable farming history, save for the efforts put in by those trying vainly to live on the hard red earth of the Neranleigh-Fernvale beds. In 1877, a journalist from the *Queensland Times* wrote some words about that, so true they echo yet:

*Whatever Minister threw open the lands in this district to agricultural selection must have known that a farmer could not live upon 200 acres, let alone 40 or even 80 acres … I saw some residents fencing in bare useless stony ridges … I could not but feel sad at the sight.*

But when our fortune played itself out, our local economy was buoyed by the presence of the works and local farmers supplemented their income by working for the Board, and at the same time were shaken from any primitive thoughts by the engineering and modernity on display. For this reason we should remember Alexander Stewart, the Board's Engineer-in-Chief from 1882 until 1900, who first proposed a water supply scheme based at Mount Crosby and in his later life remained a stalwart for its maintenance and expansion.

Though he hailed from a very old Scottish family, Alexander was born in Australia and first saw the light of day in 1843 at Rosedale, near Belfast, Victoria. There he spent an enjoyable and studious childhood and perhaps enjoyed a boast (for he was able to) that he was the grandson of Admiral John Gore of the British Navy (a member of Cook's famous expedition of discovery and the first man to shoot a kangaroo) and that he was the nephew of Lieutenant Graham Gore, who perished on the ill-fated Franklin expedition to the arctic in 1840.

Alexander studied mechanical engineering at Melbourne University and commenced employment with the railways in Victoria. Later he worked on rail engineering projects in central Queensland and South Australia, eventually being appointed Assistant Engineer of Railways (in South Australia). In 1882, he joined the Brisbane Board of Water Works and held a prominent position in the construction of the Gold Creek reservoir. Two years later he attained the role of Engineer- in-Chief to the Brisbane Board, a position he held until his unexpected death in 1900.

Alexander was a frequent visitor to Mount Crosby between 1890 and 1892 before handing operational duties at the pumping station to Joseph Stewart (no relation).

Col Hester