

Mount Hunter

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Mount Hunter is less a suburb than a district and village, 5km west of Camden and 6km east of The Oaks in the Wollondilly Shire near Camden NSW.

Before white settlement, the original inhabitants were the Tharawal and Gundungurra peoples. Another tribe or perhaps subgroup of Aborigines in the Cowpastures area was called Cubbitch-barta, the name coming from words for the white pipe clay.

Mount Hunter is 70 kms southwest of Sydney. The western boundary would be Mt Hunter Rivulet, which flows into the Nepean, and the suburb adjoins Cawdor at Fosters Lane, with the northern boundary formed by Flaggy Creek. Burragorang Road is the main arterial road leading from Camden to Nattai (Burragorang is an Aboriginal word derived from “burra” meaning kangaroo - or “booroon” meaning small animal - and “gang” meaning “hunting”).

Governor Hunter visited the area in 1796 to check on the well-being of the newly discovered herd of cattle and “ascended a hill which, from every point of view has appeared the highest in the neighbourhood”. The hill was marked on the map as Mt Hunter, and indeed there are rocks inscribed with lettering which is now so weather-damaged to be illegible. There is a Trig station there. On a clear night it is possible to see Sydney’s New Year’s Eve Fireworks display from the top of Mount Hunter.

The Mount Hunter Public School (also known as Westbrook Public School) has been a focus for education since 1859. St Paul’s Anglican Church was built in 1875 and church services continue there to today. The Methodist (Uniting) church, built in 1900, was sold in 2000.

The main economic activity in the area over the years was dairying, and for a brief period of the history of Mount Hunter - from 1880 to 1907 - there was a local co-operative creamery (the Camden Dairy Company Limited) operating near the Mount Hunter Rivulet on Burragorang Road. The first creamery building was burnt down in 1902 and was almost immediately replaced by the two-storey timber building which still stands today. This building was owned by the same family from 1912 till 2000, when the last member (Clara Lavercombe) passed away without children, partner or a will. Clara lived in Mt Hunter her entire ninety-one years. Her home was the Creamery from when she was three years till her death. Her father worked as a blacksmith at Mount Hunter. Numerous postcards, letters and photographs that remain tell of family occasions over more than 100 years. The Oaks Historical Society has now indexed, stored and catalogued the family documents and letters. The Creamery is currently for sale.

Local long term residents talk fondly of the Mount Hunter Hall and the many dances held there over the years. The tables ‘groaned with the generous country suppers’. Euchre parties and Christmas parties were also held regularly.

The population growth in this area from 1890-1920s was due to the significant growth of the dairying industry. The towns of Berry & Kiama developed at the same time as

the Camden district for the same reason- all have broad river flats which are ideal for dairy cattle.

There were the Mount Hunter Boxing Day Sports which were held from the 1910s to 1930s, and these included such sports as “Gents Nail Driving Competition” and a “Tug of War” between Wollondilly Shire & Camden Municipality.

Locals tell us that, during the war years, they had to tape brown paper or blankets over windows to ‘brown out’ the area. One local reported that the St Johns Camden air raid siren could be heard in Mount Hunter. On the corner of Spring Creek Road and Burratorang Road is the granite memorial to those who went to World War I, a continuing reminder to later generations of how many from this small rural population gave their lives in that war. At that time, agricultural activities included growing peas and cauliflowers, and there is one report of itinerant pea pickers carrying their swag and asking for work.

Several fibro houses were relocated to Mt Hunter from the Burratorang Valley when it was flooded.

In the last 20 years, large acreages in Spring Creek (the valley behind the village of Mount Hunter) have been subdivided into house blocks, as well as smaller acre lots. There are no longer any working dairy farms, the land having been subdivided for residential development, but there is a hobby winery, a herb garden and a ‘Bed & Breakfast’ in Spring Creek valley. All of these blocks are on tank water and use septic systems for sewerage. Some basic infrastructure is missing - there is no curbing and guttering or street lighting – but the lack of such modern conveniences only adds to the charm of the place!

The Mount Hunter Fire Brigade built a new station on Burratorang Road in the 1990s, and many locals are volunteer fire-fighters.

This area is not part of the South West Growth Centre but the population growth has had an effect of increasing house & land prices due to greater demand.

References:

- John Wrigley, *A History of Camden, New South Wales* (Camden Historical Society, UWS Print Shop, 2001).
- Jack L. Roberts *A History of Methodism in the Cowpastures 1843-1977* (Printed by Rex Warren & sons, Narellan 1977)