Mount Cotton - a brief history

by Mary Howells

Mount Cotton was named by surveyor Robert Dixon, after the commandant of the penal settlement of Moreton Bay, Major Sydney Cotton. The original inhabitants called the mountain Toongipin, meaning west wind. It is the Aboriginal people who are credited with showing the Mount Cotton region to various early settlers including Jack Shears, the first European to fell timber in the area.

Like the Carbrook area, Mount Cotton was settled mostly by people of German origins. Some of the early families included Hermann Holzapfel, whose property in Mount View Road was later developed by his son John. Eduard Heinemann settled first in Upper Tingalpa (Burbank) and then bought land in Mt Cotton and Redland Bay. Hans Heinemann and his son Henri lived next to Eduard at Upper Tingalpa and later moved to Mount Cotton. Henri started the first sugar mill in the area as well as being an active member of the Tingalpa Divisional Board for 11 years. Phillip Benfer and his family also initially worked for Eduard Heinemann and moved to Mount Cotton in the mid 1870s.

Early settlers had to clear the land. Maize was the first crop grown and this was closely followed by sugar. Kanakas were brought in to work the sugar plantations and this was a major industry until the late 1880s. Bananas later became a staple crop and many Chinese people were involved in this industry until the turn of the century.

Holzapfel's farm, pineapples, citrus and Chinese family huts on the hill, 1906.
(Joyce Krause)

The first church in the area was a Lutheran Church which was built on the corner of Wuduru Road and Mt Cotton Road and serviced the German communities of Gramzow and Mt Cotton. It was dedicated as St Pauls in December 1875.

Local Government was established in 1880. The Tingalpa Divisional Board covered the area now occupied by the Redland Shire; areas of Brisbane City; (to the south of Mt Gravatt Capalaba Road to Logan Road) and the Logan City suburbs of Kingston, Woodridge, Loganlea, Loganholme, Slacks Creek, Daisy Hill and Carbrook. The board's house (Shire Hall) was located at Mt Cotton near the state school.

Schools in the area were hard to establish initially. Carbrook was the first provisional school built in the area in 1877, although German schools operated widely in the communities along the Logan and at Mt Cotton. A half time school operated briefly in Mt Cotton from late in 1876 which was jointly run with the Victoria Point School. The provisional school did not open until 1884.

When the railway to Cleveland was completed in 1889 Mount Cotton residents were under the impression that the government intended to continue the line to Mount Cotton. By 1920 a Royal Commission was held to look into the viability of an extension of the Cleveland line. Alternate proposals included a link with the Belmont Tramway or a new line linking Sunnybank with Mount Cotton. All proposals aimed at improving transport of the produce of the farms in the area to markets both in Brisbane and in the southern states. New industries could also be established along the route, particularly timber and road building gravel if the Sunnybank to Mount Cotton route was chosen.

Mount Cotton locals preparing for a dance at the Tingalpa Shire Hall, 1930.
(Joyce Krause)

New industries in the early years of the 20th century included passionfruit, citrus, and mangoes which were used in chutney manufacturing. Dairying was also carried out with the cream being sent to the Kingston Butter Factory. Proponents for the Sunnybank rail link stressed the importance of access to Kingston.

Mount Cotton residents rallied to build a new community hall during the depression years. Up until that time the ageing Divisional Board's house was used for social events in the district. The new hall was built with timber logged by Daniel Benfer and was completed in the mid 1930s. Electricity was connected to the district in 1936. Planning was underway for a new Lutheran Church in the 1940s. The old traditional German structure adjacent to the cemetery on Wuduru Road was in a state of disrepair. A new timber church was located opposite the school and officially opened on Palm Sunday 1951.

During the 1940s and 50s a new industry began to develop in Mount Cotton. Adolph Benfer's poultry business began in a small way in 1933. By the 1950s he was a major player in the Queensland poultry industry. He set up an abattoir in Labrador in 1962 and then established the Mt Cotton abattoir in 1966. Benfer's contribution to the development of the poultry industry was ongoing and in 1977 he was awarded an MBE.

Urban development in Mount Cotton began in the late 1970s with the instigation of the Solar City project. Development began in July 1977 with site works and a solar demonstration house which was completed the following year. The estate has changed names over the years from Cotton Fields to the current Bayview Country Estate.

Mount Cotton landscape, mid 1960s. (Joyce Krause)