



Richmond River Historical Society Inc.

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James Stocks: chemist, businessman, and citizen

It is just over 100 years since the first Mayor of Lismore died at the age of 80. He was James Stocks who had been born in Yorkshire, England, in 1826 and had arrived in New South Wales with his wife, Elizabeth Tate, and young son in 1854. Stocks had qualified as a dispensing chemist in England and had considerable experience in this field before emigrating.

For four years he worked for Ebenezer Vickery in Sydney and then decided to establish a dispensing service in Casino in 1859. It is possible that this venture was financed by Vickery or that the Casino service was a branch of Vickery's Sydney shop. Whatever the case Stocks later incorporated a general store and became a successful businessman. Like most storekeepers of that time he was involved in the cedar trade. Cedar was the only currency available to most cedar-getters and storekeepers could later sell the logs on when ships came to port.

While at Casino he became well known for his skills as a dispensing chemist. The only doctor in the area was Dr Barker at Gundurimba and when he died Stocks found that people relied on him even more. Even when another doctor came to the area people often preferred to consult Stocks.

In the early 1870s James Stocks purchased property at what is now known as Caniaba. He sold his business in Casino and established a grazing property and dairy farm at Caniaba. He also built a somewhat lavish home there. In 1874 his wife Elizabeth died but in 1875 he married again. This was to Ann, a daughter of William Yabsley, the Coraki ship builder. Unfortunately, Ann and a baby son died in childbirth in 1878 leaving James with a two-year old daughter.



James moved to Lismore where he opened a business as auctioneer and commission agent. With Lismore being proclaimed a Municipality in 1879 Stocks nominated for Council. He was elected and later became Lismore's first Mayor. He held this position for a number of years during which period he married for a third time and built himself a fine home at East Lismore. This house, named "Tarmons", was later to become the first home of St Vincents Hospital.

During his term on Council Stocks was responsible for many improvements in Lismore. These included provision of a public recreation area and the setting aside of land for a new cemetery. He was always interested in politics and was returning officer at several elections. Twice he nominated for the New South Wales state parliament but was defeated.

He is said to have been a quiet man and people needed time to know his worth. Perhaps this is why he was popular in the local elections but not in the wider electorate. Perhaps his being a Justice of the Peace and also a Police Magistrate made him unpopular with some people.

Unfortunately, a major fire in Molesworth Street caused him considerable financial loss as well as destroying all his papers and business records. He never really recovered from this disaster. He is remembered with the naming of Stocks Park and Stock (or Stocks) Street (though the latter may be only a coincidence as the street was originally a stock route running past property owned by him at East Lismore). He is buried in the North Lismore Cemetery.

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