



Richmond River Historical Society Inc.

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The Browns of Browns Creek

In Lismore today most people would travel over Browns Creek without knowing it was there, especially if they were going over the track from Richmond Lane Car Park to Zadoc Street. On most maps of Lismore it does not appear. However, it has a long history and so does the family who gave its name to the Creek.

Browns Creek was a part of the natural drainage system of Lismore. It ran from below the New Ballina Cutting, down Orion Street, across the area now occupied by Lismore Caravan Park, over Dawson and Zadoc Streets, down Keen Street and across to Molesworth Street, where it entered the main river system just above the old Northern Star Building. Today it is contained by large drainage pipes and mostly covered by roadway and car park.

It is named after Henry Johnson Brown who arrived in Australia with his sister in 1840. They had been born in Whitehaven, Cumberland and Henry was a printer. He obtained work as a cook on Ward Stephens' station, Runnymede, and it was there that he met Caroline Browning. They were married in 1846. The Brownings had previously worked for Stephens on what was to become known as Lismore Station, and are said to have been the first white settlers in Lismore. They moved to Runnymede when Stephens sold this part of his acreage to William Wilson.

It is probably not surprising, therefore, that Henry and Caroline decided, in March 1847, to travel to Lismore Station and find employment with William Wilson. With no bridge across the Richmond Henry first of all had to swim across and speak to Wilson. Having obtained work he swam back and made a raft to carry Caroline and their goods across. Henry and Caroline did not remain long at Lismore Station, however. Between 1848 and 1850 they moved to several areas and Henry started what was probably a part-time business as a hawker.



Browns Creek about 1895.

By 1850 they had returned to the Richmond and Henry began work at Bald Hill (later Bexhill) as a timber cutter and dealer. At this time Bald Hill was a major cedar camp, but it was a hard and lonely life for both men and women. Henry soon lost interest in the life of a cedar cutter. He was more interested in trading. He took his growing family back to Lismore and set up a saw pit on the river bank and engaged men to work with him. He purchased logs, milled them, and sold the timber both locally and out of the district.

He built a home for his family and later extended it into Lismore's first hotel, the Cedar Squarers' Arms. He obtained a liquor licence and purchased several more blocks of land in the Molesworth and Woodlark Streets area. He had a large garden near the Creek. He soon found that a store was needed, so he built this. It is also said that he built the first school in Lismore.

He continued to work as a timber merchant and employed a number of teamsters to go into the forests and bring logs out with bullock teams. Earlier most of the logs had come down via the creeks and River to be snagged on a rope looped across the River at Lismore.

In 1867 he had debt problems, largely because he had taken too many promissory notes in good faith. He died suddenly in 1868 before this case was settled. Much of his land was lost to creditors. He is buried at North Lismore. Caroline married again.

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