



If you have some more time to enjoy Toowoomba's heritage you may like to try other walks around Queens Park, Caledonian Estate, Mort Estate and Russell Street. Brochures on these walks are available at various outlets including the Tourist Information Centres.

Further information on Toowoomba's history can be gained from a wide range of sources. The Council's Local History Information Centre at 476 Ruthven Street and the Historical Society at 49 Lindsay Street are two excellent starting points.

If you have no further use for this brochure, please consider recycling it by returning it to where you collected it, so that others may enjoy this walk.

Thanks to Bob Dansie for preparing the text.

Published by Toowoomba Regional Council
Reprinted June 2010

www.smarttrngroup.com 296 16022

A Walk

THROUGH HISTORY

WITH BOB DANSIE



Toowoomba's Cultural and Legal Precincts

Allow an hour for a brisk walk
or longer for a leisurely stroll.

*There have been dreams for thee by men
who slumber*

*Sound is here no voice can reach
Who ere they joined the host that none
may number*

*Saw what they strove to teach -
The vision of a city, wide and splendid,
Crowning the Range's wall
And o'er thy sweeping plateau,
far extended
Welcome to all!*

George Essex Evans - Toowoomba

This brochure encompasses a "historic precinct" tour of Toowoomba and, in doing so, illustrates the vision and endeavours of the men whose dreams Evans meant in his poem.

The precinct is bounded by Margaret, Neil, James and Hume Streets, an area rich in history of institutions on which the cultural, spiritual, legal and social life of the city is founded.

THE OLD POST OFFICE

This fine building was Toowoomba's second post office, built in 1877 to replace a much smaller one on the south-west corner of Ruthven and Russell Streets. Like its neighbour, the Court House, it was designed by the Government Architect, Mr Stanley, and built by John Garget, who was also a contractor on the railway. The stone used was the beautiful rich creamy white sandstone quarried at Murphy's Creek. Initially, the post office was responsible only for mail and telegraph services but with the advent of telephone a century ago, it became the telephone exchange as well. A feature of interest is the clock tower, which at the request of the Council

and citizens was set forward of the building alignment so that it could be seen from the junction of Margaret and Ruthven Streets.

THE COURTHOUSE

The courthouse was built in 1878, to replace a building on the site of present De Molay House, (a site on the Queens Park Walk), next to the jail. Of interest at the courthouse is the annex in Neil Street, which is of later construction and made of Helidon sandstone, quarried 20km east of Toowoomba. It was in the courthouse that Essex Evans worked in his capacity as Registrar of births, deaths and marriages



THE POLICE STATION

The car park behind the courthouse was the original site of the fire station. Next to it, in 1886, the colonial government built police barracks, to replace the police station on the south side of Russell Street, between Ruthven and Victoria Streets. The present building dates from 1936. It is of historic interest as one of four substantial brick buildings erected by "relief workers" during the depression of the 1930s to provide employment for unemployed men. These men worked three days per week. The other buildings are the schools at North, South and East Toowoomba.

WESLEY CHURCH

On the left as we proceed up Neil Street is the former Wesley Methodist Church, later Wesley Uniting Church, but now no longer a place of worship.

It was built in 1877 by Richard Godsall to a design by the Brisbane Architect Willoughby Powell, who also designed the original Toowoomba Grammar School building and the Town Hall. The church was the result of efforts by Rev W.G. Taylor who later founded the Sydney City Mission. He bought the land at auction from the government for 600 pounds in 1876, declaring at the auction that he needed it for a church.



THE EMPIRE THEATRE

The original theatre was built in 1911 by a group of people who had been showing “moving pictures” in the Austral Hall from about 1907. The Empire was designed to present both vaudeville and motion pictures. It hosted many famous shows before it burnt down in 1932. The north and south walls remained standing, and were incorporated into the rebuilt theatre, which has recently been refurbished to become undoubtedly one of the most dignified and attractive theatres in Queensland.

THE MASONIC TEMPLE

The temple was built by James Renwick and was completed in 1886. It was set well back to allow for a circular driveway from Neil Street so the distinguished gentlemen of the Masonic fraternity could be driven to the door. There was a paddock provided at the hall where horses and carriages could be safely left during meetings. A distinguished gentleman who was a noted explorer and engineer, Augustus Charles Gregory, (who built Harlaxton House, at Munro Street, as his residence) was the Grand Master at some time in the 1880s.

THE PORTADOWN HOTEL

The hotel on this site holds one of the oldest licences in Toowoomba. The original hotel was built by German migrant Henry Lindenberg, about 1863. He named it the Prince Albert, but when the Masons moved to their new hall, it was re-named the Freemason’s Arms, probably because it was the closest watering hole to the Masons’ building. It has gone through various name changes since.



NEIL STREET TO JAMES STREET

This was originally a residential street - one magnificent old home now divided into flats, remains on the corner of Neil and Gore Streets. Toowoomba’s first butter factory and ice works - The Silverwood Butter Factory - was in this area, between Neil and Ruthven Streets. Silverwood Street was named after it.

THE JAMES-NEIL STREET CORNER

The south-eastern corner was given to the Municipal Council by the Queensland Government in 1861 as a site for a Town Hall. (James Street was then considered the main street of Toowoomba). Freidrich Stein, a German builder, erected a Town Hall in 1861-2. It was the first purpose-built Town Hall in Queensland. The building was replaced by a brick building in 1880, but this in turn was demolished and the site was sold to the Education Department in 1905.

ST PATRICK’S CATHEDRAL

The first part of this magnificent church was built in 1885, replacing a chapel built in the 1860s. The Roman Catholic community is the only group to have retained the original two acre land grant which the then N.S.W. government gave to all

recognised sects of the church - Anglican, Catholic, Presbyterian, Methodist, and (later) Lutheran.

St Patrick’s was designed by James Marks and built by Richard Godsall. It is one of four churches in Toowoomba built with the fine basalt flagstones from Toowoomba Quarry. The others are: St Lukes, St Stephens in the City Centre, and St Matthews in Drayton.



THE AUSTRALIAN HOTEL

Although now delicensed, the building on the north-west corner was built by a German named Oelkers. He called it the Hamburgh Hotel but in 1864 changed the name to The Australian. It is now a medical centre. James Street originally contained many hotels but only two - The Settlers Inn and The Federal now remain.

THE CORNER OF HUME AND JAMES STREETS

There are two sites of historic interest here. The south-west corner was originally the two acre site given to the Presbyterian Church for its manse and church. A small wooden church was built on the corner in 1858 (a cairn marks its position). A manse was also built, but the church moved its centre of operations, first to Bell Street and then to St Stephens and in recent years the site was sold to become a car yard.

ST DENIS’S HOSPITAL

The two storey building, carefully restored and occupied by radio station 4AK was originally a private hospital. The building fronting Hume and James Street is the original, but a similar building was erected by the station in Hume Street.

HUME STREET TO MARGARET STREET

This section of Hume Street had many gentlemen’s residences most of which have fallen to the demolisher’s hammer. One that has not is “Laguna”. This was once the home of the Hooper family, which had a large factory on the site of the Hooper Centre. George Hooper and his descendants manufactured many grocery lines such as soap, vinegar, cordials, soft drinks and jelly crystals.

THE CORNER OF HUME AND MARGARET STREETS

This is a most interesting historical area. The north-east corner, now, called Vera Lacaze Park to honour our first woman alderman, was the site of Toowoomba’s first pubic swimming baths built by the Municipal Council in 1894. It was a thirty-yard pool, fully enclosed, and fed by a spring in East Creek. The water was conveyed by conduit under Margaret Street to the pool. The pool was entirely built of massive tongue and groove planks of hardwood, bolted to piles. There was no concrete used. The pool was replaced by the Milne Bay Memorial Pool, named after a famous World War II battle.

THE TECHNICAL COLLEGE

The Technical College, on the south-east corner was built in 1911 and replaced a building which had a checkered career. It was built as a hotel - The Royal Exchange - in 1860, but never prospered. It became Toowoomba’s first Grammar School - a private venture - in 1867, and in the 1870s was acquired by the Queensland Government as an Immigration Depot (ie. A place where newly arrived migrant labourers and settlers might be accommodated while awaiting employment on selections). It became derelict, and was finally demolished about 1910 to make way for the high school and technical college - one of several built in that period as the state government moved to provide secondary education for the first time.