

Colo River: History of property known as Livingstone, Lower Portland

(The property owned by Mick O'Dowd, who invited KMYC at Easter after previous properties used since 1957 – member Dr McGarrity's and then Farmer Brown's – were sold in the 1980s.)

This summary is taken mostly from the book *The Coloites* by Diana Hazard. Summarised by Briar Jensen

The northern side of the Colo River was the **Parish of Hawkesbury, County of Hunter**

Portion 21 (40.47 acres) was granted to George Hibbs in 1804 by Governor Philip.

George Hibbs was the son of Peter Hibbs who was a seaman on the First Fleet ship *Sirius*. He was selected to be one of Governor Philip's crew on his exploratory trip up the Hawkesbury.

In 1804 Peter Hibbs was granted Portion 48 (40.47 acres) on the southern side of the Colo.

In the same year his son George Hibbs was granted Portion 21 on the northern side.

In the 1870s Portion 21 was bought by William Jones and his wife Margaret. They called the farm **Livingstone**. The Victorian style stone house was built in the late 1880s.

William Jones also built the first known mill in the Colo Valley, at Stupid Point*, Lower Portland in 1903, called Portland Timber Company. He had extensive holdings of cedar leases on the Wheelbarrow Ridge and at Wheeney Creek. His six sons assisted in the business, but floating the logs out was difficult and dangerous. He sold the mill in 1918.

Thomas Christie of Lower Portland is credited with the introduction of citrus to the Colo River Valley in the 1830s. Over the next few decades practically all farms in the valley planted oranges, mandarins or grapefruit. Farms started experimenting with irrigation.

William Jones had irrigation in a big way on his 100-acre farm, of which 50 were planted with citrus and summer fruits. He used the Nunan patent principal.

"The water is lifted by a centrifugal pump 21 feet and applied directly to the land by means of surface pipes and sprayers. The pump is driven by a suction gas engine."
Hawkesbury Herald 1903.

William Jones was a producer of "Orange Wine" the local stimulant served at most celebrations in the valley. In 1903 the Hawkesbury Herald reported,

"Mr Jone's supply of orange wine became exhausted a few weeks ago – his pigs drank the last cask. One of them, while nosing around noticed a cork projecting from the side thereof and of course the pig must pull it out, with the result that all the beautiful wine drained away – but not letting it waste presently all of them became 'blind paralytic drunk'."

Lower Portland was also the first area to have a stone fruit industry. Peaches were a particular favourite and William Jones's *Mammoth*, which he grew from a stone, yielded as much as nine cases to the tree with the fruit realising up to nine shillings per case. *Briggs Red May* was another favourite.

The Town and Country Journal in 1910 noted that ‘Mr W. Jones, whose holding is convenient to the mouth of the river, has 50 acres under cultivation and in this area has 3000 citrus trees and 2000 summer fruit trees. Common oranges largely prevail... one (a seedling) though over 70 years old, is one of the healthiest trees on the place, and yields from 9 to 10 gin-cases of fruit in fair seasons.’

The following is an extract from an article Five Days on the Colo River by two young men rowing a small skiff. It was first published in Dalgety’s Review and reprinted in the Windsor & Richmond Gazette in January 1902. It is reprinted in Perfect Hawkesbury Holidays compiled by Jocelyn Powell.

... presently found the orangery with the wine press, the owner of which, taking us to his cellar, filled us a tankard of a most palatable dry wine, which he assured us, besides invigorating qualities, possessed such valuable stomachic properties that it had cured a most eminent Sydney banker of chronic dyspepsia. We learnt that he sold locally as much as he could make, and that on the Colo he was the sole restaurateur. We noticed, moreover, a twinkle in his eye, as he courteously accompanied us to our boat, but put it down solely to the orange wine, little dreaming that we were to become the victims of the great local joke.

*For the next mile or so we put our best back into it, remarking only that the river took an enormous bend, and certainly not in the least prepared to be hailed half an hour afterwards by a portly gentleman from the bank, who proved to be none other than our friend of the flagon. ‘Come up and have a bite with me’ he said ‘and I’ll tell you all about it.’ Landed he showed us that his house was built on an isthmus, quite imperceptible from either side. * The Aboriginal name for his property he said meant ‘Stupid Point’, for following the river, as was their universal custom in their nomadic wanderings, they found themselves at night grilling their fish over the embers of the fire they had left in the morning. Hawkers navigating the river for the first time called always at his house twice, but he neglected to inform us whether the local voyagers availed themselves of that convenience on a thirsty day.*