EARLY SILVERTON

SOME EVENTS RECALLED IN HISTORY OF THE TOWN

Recent visitors to Silverton in an effort to delve into the glories of that early-day township failed to find official foundation stones that would give any indication as to when such solid buildings as the Courthouse and Police Station and Gaol were constructed. The glories of Silverton are fast fading, but there are still many people about who lived at the once flourishing town who talk with pride of the achievements of the place and its people, many of whom made history in after years.

The Courthouse, which is now seldom used, was once a building where all the dignity of a court of justice was maintained to the fullest extent, and people flocked from Broken Hill to hear cases before the Broken Hill Courthouse was constructed, and before the boom days of this city. The Silverton Courthouse is a roomy place, and the fittings make it evident that those in charge of the administration of justice at the period thought that the Courthouse would serve the surrounding district for many years to come. The fittings could now be serviceably used in some more thickly populated part, and they would do credit to any courtroom. The Gaol at Silverton is also an eyeopener, and this must have also been constructed with an eye to many years of life for the township of Silverton and its district. Present officials have no records of any real bad men being sent to the prison, which seldom now has an occupant except children who are sent there from the Broken Hill Children's Court on remand. They are kept there under the charge of a constable. At night they sleep on stretchers in the cells, and are provided with mattresses and plenty of blankets. They are fed in a large hall way, the food being cooked at the gaol. During the day the children—both boys and girls go to the place—are allowed to wander in two large exercise yards, one for each sex. The Gaol has eight large cells, two remand yards, bathrooms, a hospital ward, and store and workrooms, but all these have not been regularly used for years. The constable is kept busy keeping the place from falling into disrepair. There is nothing left behind, no messages from prisoners of other days on the walls, but the modern boys and girls who have spent time there have an honor roll in the bathrooms and on the walls of the exercise yards. There many of them have scrawled their names with a finger dipped in tar from cell pans. Of course all this is done behind the back of the officer, and he can never trace the culprit.

Few residents of Silverton can go back into the past. Most of the men connected with the field in the early days have gone far afield, and many have died. A tour through the place gives clear indication of the once prosperous town. There are many old ruins and solid stone buildings, and visitors when they are told there were about seven or eight hotels, bank buildings, and public buildings, can scarcely imagine that a town could almost be obliterated in such a few short years. There seems no prosperity at Silverton now, yet the residents still find something to do. Some are in business, others have gardens, while others work in the district. Gardening is carried on a decreased scale but a good deal of the vegetables sold in Broken Hill came from Silverton. Poultry farming is another industry, and one man spoken to recently said he had about 500 fowls, and got approximately 200 eggs daily from them, and that the eggs found ready buyers in Broken Hill.

For the new generation some important events in the history of Silverton and district might be quoted. They are:-January 5, 1885, Resch's brewery opened; January, 12, 1886, meeting established a branch of the A.M.A.; March 4, 1889, Acacia Public School opened; April 15, 1889, Purnamoota gold rush proved a duffer; April 16, 1886, Dr. Seabrook, later superintendent of the Broken Hill

Hospital, arrived at Silverton; June 1, 1887, first district court held at Silverton presided over by Judge Backhouse; June 24, 1885, Day Dream Smelters started; June 28, 1885, first smelters started at Pinnacles; August 2, 1886, first telegraph line opened between Broken Hill and Silverton; August 13, 1885, telegraph line to Silverton opened ; August 15, 1885, post office opened at the Day Dream; August 16, 1885, Bible Christian Church opened at Silverton; August 25, 1885, telegraph line opened between Silverton and Sydney; August 30. 1884, "Silver Age" first issued at Silverton; September 9, 1887, Silverton and Cockburn railway completed; October 2, 1884, the Rev. Mr.Riddle, first Presbyterian minister, arrived at Silverton; October 16, 1885, advance guard of the Salvation Army arrived at Silverton; October 22, 1886, Silverton proclaimed a municipality; November 1, 1884, Masonic Lodge formed at Silverton; November 14, 1884, Silverton Hospital opened with eight patients; November 17, 1884, Silverton School opened with F. Mackie as teacher; November 20, 1885, Presbyterian Church opened at Silverton; December 7, 1886, direct telephone communication between Adelaide andSilverton.

Silverton was originally known as Umberumberka and was first officially recognised by the Government on September 17, 1880, when Richard O'Connell was sent in charge of the police and also given charge of many other offices such as Clerk of Petty Sessions, Warden's Clerk, and Mining Registrar. At that time all the population covering an area of 400 square miles was 115. One constable and a black tracker under a superintendent at Deniliquin were responsible for law and order. The first decided influx of people took place in 1883, and in September of that year there was a population of 250. In 1884 the population, according to a census taken by Senior-Constable O'Connell, numbered 1745, including Chinese. From that period when it became known that silver lodes existed people swarmed in, and soon the population exceeded 3000, the proportion of women to men being 1 to 50. This was about the maximum population, and as excitement about the mining field ran high there were sensational happenings in the history of the place. The increase in the population was considerably ahead of any provision for the times, and those who possessed tents were very much envied. In the big rush food of every species advanced in price. Bread was 2/ a 4lb. loaf, meat 7d. a lb. while no vegetables except potatoes could be had for love or money. Water cost 6d. a bucket, but it was poor stuff. A purer quality said to have been brought from Mingary, was retailed at 1/ a bucket. The well-known Rat Hole tank, some miles out from the town, which now provides for travelling stock, then met some of the demands of residents. In those days it was thought that a railway from Sydney to Silverton must come, and as is the case now there was a bidding from South Australia and Sydney for trade. In 1891 the population of Silverton dropped back to 1600, while Silverton and district today has a population of 503. The principal support of the town in 1891 was provided by the Umberumberka mine and the flux quarries in the vicinity of theAcacia Siding.