

"The Romance of a Tasmanian Tavern"

Cooley's Hotel, Historic Main Road Landmark

Another structural landmark, intimately associated with the early years of suburban development, will disappear when the well known hostelry, COOLEY'S HOTEL at Moonah, is demolished to make way for modern hotel premises, whose design and aspect will be in keeping with the growth and importance of the thriving suburban centre. Before it passes, Cooley's Hotel, as it stands today, calls for written record. It stood as a prominent Main Road landmark when all around were open paddocks and bushland; when the Launceston - Hobart coach daily passed by, and when the horse bus and waggonette brought their visiting town parties to its door for the good old game of skittles, followed by refreshment.

Although the exact date cannot be ascertained, it is believed that Cooley's Hotel is approaching 100 years old.(*1) The earliest available record begins with the association of Thomas Todd Cooley, about 80 years ago, with the inn. It was then a one story building with attic rooms, and was known as the Horse and Jockey Hotel, distinguished by the sign of a race horse with jockey up. Some years later a Hobart contractor, Mr B. Gooding, added a second story to the hotel, and carried out extensive interior alterations to the ground floor, since when it has changed not at all in outward appearance, and only slightly inside.

Thomas Todd Cooley, the licensee at the beginning of our story, came out from England as a young man,(*2) and was the familiar host of the Horse and Jockey about 80 years ago. Here he lived with his wife and family. At the time there was another hotel at Moonah, the Prince Albert, kept by one Samuel Payne, on the site of what is now a boarding house, adjoining the Moonah tramway sheds, a few hundred yards from Cooley's Hotel. This was later bought by Thomas Cooley and closed as a hotel, since when the now existing tavern has been the only one in the district. Becoming too aged for the establishment's active management, Thomas Todd Cooley gave way to a son-in-law, W. Barlow, in whose time the building was extended. The hotel was then purchased from the Cooley family by the Cascade Brewery Company, and was leased to a succession of licensees, amongst them Messrs. Anderson, Dobbie and Terry, before Mr Charles Cooley, a grandson of the Thomas Todd Cooley, became a lessee, and again associated the Cooley name with the inn. Another grandson, Arthur Cooley, became the next licensee, followed by T. Donnelly and Mrs Charles Cooley and her two sons. Following Mrs Charles Cooley's presidency, the hotel came under the management of the present popular host, Mr W.C. Sibley, a well known

Tasmanian athlete in his younger days and a New Norfolk councillor for ten years, during which time he controlled the Freemason's Hotel in that centre.

Cooley's Bus Service

Thomas Todd Cooley was the owner and controller of the horse bus coaching service from Hobart to Moonah, or South Glenorchy, as it was then constituted, and the branch service from South Glenorchy to Glenorchy proper. Cooley maintained upwards of sixty horses for these services, and some of his old buses are still recalled by the names of Metropolitan (his biggest coach), the Polyphemus, the Ben Bolt and others. All his horses were stabled at the side and back of the hotel, and adjoining the premises was a farrier's shop, also owned and managed by Cooley, a farrier by trade. The Hobart terminus of the Moonah-Hobart service was the Albion Hotel, in Elizabeth St.

The old man experienced unexpected competition from his son John in his coaching service at one stage, but, like several other similar mushroom growths that sprang up in opposition to the original Cooley coaches, it was short-lived, and the TT Cooley buses were the reigning service for many years. When Thomas Cooley gave place to his son-in-law in the hotel business, the buses passed into the hands of his youngest son, Charles, but the old man spent his years of retirement at his famous hostelry. The Cooley buses were in great demand also for private picnic or race outings, while they also conveyed Government House parties to the hotel for champagne dinners.

Racing Reminiscences

Cooley's Hotel is closely associated with the early racing history of Southern Tasmania, and when the old race course occupied portion of part of Moonah known as Albert Park, the inn was the meeting place of the racing fraternity. Its original name of Horse and Jockey probably arose from its racing associations. Here victories were celebrated and consolation found after defeat. Many well known race horses were stabled at Cooley's and in earlier days mainland racing men in I. Foulsham, Scobie, Bobby Lewis, S. Cracknell, Batt, Joe Cripps, Walter Higginbotham, and others made this central hotel their Tasmanian headquarters, even when the Moonah course was done away with and Elwick became the venue of thoroughbred racing.

The original stable buildings stand, in outward appearance, just as they were in bygone days, but the interior of the stables has been converted into modern loose-boxes. The old cobbled yard, portion of which is still visible, was the scene

also of a monthly horse sale, and it was nothing unusual for the father of Mr S.E. Abbott (starter to the T.R.C. at Elwick) to auction up to 200 horses at the one sale. Cooley's horse sale was then the biggest in Southern Tasmania.

Story of Two Cups

Thomas Todd Cooley owned a racehorse called Swordsman, and it is on record that with this horse the host of Cooley's Hotel won, on the old Moonah course, the first silver cup ever presented in Australasia. It was literally the first Hobart Cup.*³ A story is told of Charles Todd Cooley and Samuel Blackwell, the latter then mine host of the Melton Mowbray Hotel. The two were very close friends, and both were interested in race horses. At a New Norfolk Cup meeting both men had a horse entered in the day's principal race Cooley, Swordsman, and Blackwell a horse called Panic. There was keen friendly rivalry between the two men, but Blackwell's horse proved the better, and won the cup. (Panic, by the way, later won a Launceston Cup, and sired many good horses.) The cup was duly presented to Blackwell, who placed it in his horse drawn bus to take back to Melton Mowbray, intending to display it at all the hotels en route. Cooley, as a joke, surreptitiously purloined the trophy, and placed it in his own bus. What was the consternation of Blackwell, therefore, when at his first stop he was unable to find the cup trophy, and show it off before his hotel friends. The borrowing jest was later admitted, and the cup returned, but it caused a temporary estrangement between the two men.

Opposite Cooley's Hotel was the Victoria sports ground, and here also sports meetings of all kinds were held, while it is also said that trotting horse races for side wagers and stakes of 1 pound to 10s. were held over a mile Main Road course from Glenorchy to a finishing post in front of Cooley's Hotel. Needless to record, most of the stakes and winnings found their way over the bar counter of the old hostelry. And this was in the days when beer was 3d. a pint. Men were heavy drinkers in those times, and after a big race meeting, with money flowing as freely as the beer, "sports" of the day would need a week in residence at the inn to sober up. The "good old days", according to some of the older generation.

The Game of Skittles

Skittle Alley, at the rear of Cooley's Hotel, where "the good old game of skittles" was played for drinks, side wagers, and even dinner parties, attracted its town crowds, who made the trip to this rendezvous in one or other of Cooley's buses. Today what was former skittle alley is a loose box for horses, but it was the scene of much excitement in earlier times, and gave its added interest and attractiveness to the roadside inn.

A Bushranging Incident

Cooley's Hotel was once invaded by four bushrangers, but the story goes that old Thomas Todd Cooley, a fiery-tempered and strong man, beat them off with his fists single-handed, and bare as the result of his encounter scarred and twisted fingers to the day of his death.(*4)

Although a hotelkeeper, old Thomas Todd never encouraged boys to his premises, and a story is told of three young fellows one day returning from a kangaroo hunt, and breasting up to the bar, not for strong liquor, but +or a ginger beer and raspberry. They entered the bar with all the bravado of men going to drink the hotel dry, but they received a sudden setback when the old keeper chased them from the premises with his stick, and warning them off the hotel. A hotel was a place for men, not for boys!

Soon the old inn will be rased to the ground, and in its place will rise a modern hotel. But around the old site will always linger memories of other times, when skittle alley was a popular pastime, and when men drank their beer from pewter mugs when the coach drew in.

Notes relating to newspaper article 1/3/1934 :

*1 The earliest record of the existence of the Horse and Jockey Inn is in the Hobart Town Gazette October 1841.

*2 Thomas Todd Cooley arrived in Van Diemens Land in ie24, sentenced to life transportation for stealing.

*3 The Tasmanian Racing Club have no record of a horse called Swordsman winning a cup. It could be that it was held in the years before records were kept.

*4 Convict record of 1824 gives physical description of Thomas Todd Cooley as having "little finger left hand crippled"