

Lion of Waterloo Hotel

Montefiores

This sad timber and brick structure, showing the ravages caused by the weather over many years, was once the busy Lion of Waterloo Hotel at Montefiores in the Wellington Valley. The valley and hotel commemorate in their names the Allied defeat of Napoleon in 1815.

The fertile Wellington Valley was discovered in 1817 by Lieutenant John Oxley, I Surveyor-General of New South Wales, but no attempt at settlement was made for another five years. In February 1823 a party of soldiers and convicts led by Lieutenant Percy Simpson arrived to establish a convict settlement on high ground overlooking the Bell River. Convicts were kept until 1831, when their settlement became for a brief period a government stock station.

Once Simpson and his party had moved into the valley, free settlers followed, and from onwards the population of the valley and surrounding countryside increased rapidly. Not far from the township of Wellington, at the junction of the Bell and Macquarie rivers, came the village of Wellington. Wellington had a somewhat confused beginning, for in 1840 Joseph Barrow Monte founded the village of Montefiores on a site two miles along the river and on the opposite bank. In the early 1850s Wellington had the district courthouse, general stores, and several cottages, with a population of twenty-nine, while Montefiores had a population of one hundred and eighty.

Montefiores was settled before Wellington and was the coach stop for Cobb & Co., where horses were changed for the next stage. However, Montefiores was built on the banks which were possibly liable to erosion, and therefore Wellington was favoured as a suitable site for development of a township.

Here, near the ford and the coach depot, a young Belgian named Hyeronimus, who had emigrated to Moreton Bay and Molong, built his Lion of Waterloo Hotel in 1842. It proved a successful business venture and no doubt attracted many settlers and workmen from the surrounding district, while later on, local miners might have gathered there to celebrate their good fortune, depending upon their credit with the proprietor, drown their sorrows. Other customers would have been the teamsters and other travellers passing up and down the road to Bathurst, for this was the first and oldest township in the west and for many years the only one beyond Bathurst. With the influx of travellers came the latest news and gossip of the outside world. In 1859 elections were held for the New South Wales Legislative Assembly, which Hyeronimus contested, to be returned a Member for Wellington. Unfortunately he did not live long to enjoy the honours of his position, for he died in Sydney on 27 June 1860, at the age of fifty-two. A few years later Wellington township overtook Montefiores in importance when a bridge was constructed across the river and the older settlement withered away.

