Waterview Sawmill and Sugar Mill Site

Other Names N/A
Street Address McRae Street and 2 Gavin Street
Title Details/ GPS Coordinates 11SP205466, 1RP22172, 2RP76519

Historical Context
Bundaberg was established in the late 1860s. The Burnett River was identified by John Charles Burnett (after which was it named) during his exploration of the Wide Bay and Burnett regions in 1847. Pastoral stations were established throughout the Wide Bay and Burnett in the late 1840s through to the 1860s, including stations such as Gin Gin, Walla, Bingeria, Electra, Monduran and Tantitha. The stations were initially stocked with sheep, but progressively were replaced with cattle. When prices were low, or there was an oversupply of stock (particularly in the 1860s), the cattle were rendered to produce tallow. A boiling down works was established in Baffle Creek to render the stock from the stations. John and Gavin Steuart secured a contract to provide the works with timber for tallow casks. The Steuarts established a camp in North Bundaberg in 1865 and erected a sawmill in the following year. Interest in the settlement grew rapidly and a town was surveyed on the southern bank of the Burnett River in 1866 on the site of the present day city.

Timber was the industry that acted as a catalyst for the creation of a European settlement. However, despite their efforts, it was not the Steuart brothers that enjoyed success, but rather the sawmiller Samuel Johnston, who operated a sawmill on the Fitzroy River near Rockhampton. Johnston arrived in the nascent settlement of Bundaberg with his machinery in 1868, erecting the mill on a selection on the north bank of the Burnett River called Mabbra. Timber sawn at the mill was used to construct early Bundaberg. The sawmill was damaged in the 1875 flood, but was rebuilt and then expanded in 1888. By this latter date, the mill consisted of a 70 horsepower machine, a two-storey building and 50 employees.

Johnston also erected a sugar mill adjacent to the sawmill in 1879. The first sugar mill established in Bundaberg was Millbank by Richard Palmer, which produced its first commercial sugar in 1872. The Steuarts constructed a small mill in 1875, but the Steuarts' cane was affected by 'rust' disease and the mill soon closed; the Steuarts, insolvent, left Bundaberg and moved to North Queensland, thus ending their involvement in the history of Bundaberg (although the mill was purchased and operated under the name of Woondooma). The third mill to be established was Sharon, also by Palmer. Thus Johnston's Waterview sugar mill was a relatively early mill in the history of the region. It was one of only six mills in the entire region at this time, the mills mentioned above, as well as Branyan and Cuba. Johnston continued to operate the Waterview sugar mill until he sold it to the Milliquin sugar mill in the late 1890s.

The sugar and timber mills were clearly a significant operation as the Bundaberg-Mount Perry railway was extended specifically to the mill in 1893. The rail extension helped Johnston access more easily cane from the Isis district, but it also helped bolster the railway: the timber produced from the sawmill led to more rail traffic on the line than the copper mine, for which it had been built.

The sawmill closed in 1903 and the sugar mill around the same time. Johnston relocated to Mossman in North Queensland and became integral to the sugar industry there. Johnston's residence was located on the site of the sawmill, and it was shifted approximately 100m east of its original location in 1989. It is possible that the residence currently located on the property is in fact Sam Johnston's home “Waterview”, albeit relocated and with substantial modifications, however as a detailed inspection of the building was not undertaken this cannot be confirmed categorically.

Physical Description
The Waterview Sawmill and Sugar Mill Site is located on the northern bank of the Burnett River on approximately 4.6 hectares bordered by McRae Street and an industrial block in the west, Mariners Way in the northeast and residential lots in the east and north.

The predominantly cleared grassed site shows mature trees on the perimeter and in parts of the middle section as well as mangroves lining the riverbank. The terrain steps down from higher ground in the north to the river flats. A residence set amongst landscaped gardens is situated in the east, however a close inspection of this residence was not undertaken and therefore its provenance could not be verified. Previous assessment of the Waterview Sawmill and Sugar Mill site has indicated the presence of archaeological features associated with the sawmill.

Heritage Significance

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<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<td>A</td>
<td>The place is important in demonstrating the evolution or pattern of the region's history.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Statement</td>
<td>The Waterview Sawmill and Sugar Mill Site is important in demonstrating the evolution of the region's history, as it was one of the first commercial ventures in the settlement of Bundaberg (and the first that was commercially viable). It was also based on timber, which was the first industry to provide a catalyst for the settlement and development of the town of Bundaberg and the surrounding region. The addition of a sugar mill in the 1870s also reflects the evolution of the region, as agricultural land was largely converted to sugar cane production and sugar and juice mills were erected.</td>
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<td>C</td>
<td>The place has potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of the region's history.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Statement</td>
<td>The Waterview Sawmill and Sugar Mill Site has potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of the region's history. Archaeological material may consist of items that reflect the earliest settlement in Bundaberg from the late 1860s, as well as the layout, technology and operation of the sawmill and sugar mill, both of which were erected in a considerably early period in Bundaberg's history.</td>
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<td>The place has a special association with the life or work of a particular person, group or organisation of importance in the region's history.</td>
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<td>Statement</td>
<td>The Waterview Sawmill and Sugar Mill Site has a strong association with Samuel Johnston, one of the earliest residents and pioneers of the town of Bundaberg.</td>
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Integrity N/A
Statutory Listings No statutory listings
Non-Statutory Listings No non-statutory listings
Inspection Date 12/11/2014
### References


Queenslander, 2 December 1893.