

HISTORY OF YERONGA PART 4 EARLY FARMING

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One of the early crops planted in the farming areas of Yeronga was sugar. Interestingly, Fox's *History of Queensland* published in 1919 makes the claim that Yeronga was part of the first district where sugar was grown in Queensland.

*"...Dr. Hobbs, afterwards M.L.C., said, before a committee of immigration : A man who had been some time in Jamaica came out in the same ship with me to start a sugar company in Queensland. After waiting some months, he got a piece of land surveyed, and, though it was covered with dense scrub, the Government fixed 30s. to 40s. per acre, as the price. That was the locality now known as 'Boggo' on the border of South Brisbane, certainly a remarkable spot on which to start a sugar plantation."*¹

Sugar crops continued for some years but was gradually superseded by arrowroot due mainly to the efforts of the Grimes family. In 1857 George Grimes started to grow arrowroot on one of his farms called 'Fairfield' (which later gave its name to the suburb). George and Samuel Grimes owned a further three farms in the Yeronga/Yeerongpilly/Tennyson area. They eventually purchased the Pearl Mill Central Sugar Factory in Tennyson and change from crushing sugar to the manufacture of finished arrowroot.

The factory, opened in 1866, was managed by John Buhot who made history by producing the first cane sugar ever granulated in Queensland in the Botanical Gardens about midnight on 25th April 1862. Buhot crushed some of the canes then growing in the Gardens with a lever and boiled the juice in a saucepan with only Walter Hill, the Garden's curator, in attendance. No one else was allowed to witness the experiment aimed at finding out whether the juice of Queensland-grown cane would granulate. Just why it was thought that it might not has, unfortunately, not been recorded. However, once the information that granulation was possible became public, it prompted an increase in sugar cane planting in various Brisbane areas.

Yeronga farmers had to struggle with the low-lying nature of much of this area which regularly flooded – something well known to the local indigenous groups. Problems became acute when in 1863 the first major flood impacted on the newly developing agricultural crops. A number of floods had previously been recorded by Europeans – the first major one in 1836 which was followed by one in 1841 that seems to have been even higher than the massive one in 1893. Others followed in 1844, 1845, 1852 and 1857. After the 1863 flood, there was another the following year and then a break until 1887 when another series came in 1890, 1892, 1893, 1898 and 1908.² These floods created a growing realization that the problems of farming in Yeronga were not going away and this, in turn, impacted on the rate and type of development in the area.

Strangely enough, the far away eruption of Krakatoa on the Indonesian island of Java in August 1883 had a significant impact on Brisbane weather for a number of years and certainly had some influence on the movement from farming to closer settlement. The initial earthquake was felt particularly in the south of Brisbane with the Stephens area reported as shaking violently. The Central Queensland Herald looking back at their records of this event wrote:

*The following extracts from our columns of August, 1883 shows that early on the morning of the 29th of that month two shocks of earthquake were felt in Rockhampton and in various other parts of Queensland... Our Brisbane telegrams in reference to the earthquake are to the following effect — "The earthquake was felt rather severely in some parts of Brisbane at three o'clock this morning. It lasted about half-a-minute. It was preceded by a low rumbling sound. The vibration was very considerable in some localities, especially at South Brisbane, where the furniture swayed about violently. In one case a child was thrown out of bed."*³

¹ Fox, Matthew. *The history of Queensland : its people and industries : an historical and commercial review descriptive and biographical facts, figures and illustrations : an epitome of progress*. Brisbane: States Publishing Company, 1923. Vol. 3. p.678.

² Jones, Inigo, "The floods of the Brisbane River," Read before the Historical Society of Queensland, July 28, 1931.

³ *The Central Queensland Herald*, Thursday 17 August 1933, p.50.