History of Blacktown

Today
Blacktown was initially occupied for millennia by clans of the Darug people who referred to it by numerous names. In Australia, Blacktown is considered to be one of the most ethnically diverse cities. The origin of its European name came from an institution set up in the area to educate indigenous children. However, that institution lasted only 10 years, the name was kept as a reminder of the history of this area in Western Sydney.

Original inhabitants
The Dharug people were the original inhabitants of Western Sydney. Thousands of years ago, their ancestors arrived from Southeast Asia. When the first British people arrived there were three principal clans of indigenous people. The Dharug people lived off the land, hunting kangaroo and other animals, often catching fish and foraging for plants. They had land-management practices these include, firestick farming, gathering only as much as they needed, in order to maintain the food supply in a given area. The Dharug people were considered the first farmers in the area, however, they would soon find others intruding their land.

First Europeans
An exploration party in 1788 lead by Governor Arthur Phillip became the first people (other than the indigenous) to see the area of Blacktown. This was part of a major area which he named the Cumberland Plains, after the Duke of Cumberland.

For the penal colony Phillip was in search for farming land. Exploration parties would be taken by Watkin Tench in 1789 and 1790. Approximately, 11 convicts whose terms had expired were settled by Phillip. Dues to their lack of knowledge and experience in farming, as well as poor equipment and meagre rations, only six of the 11 remained in just a few years, after their settlement.

There were violent clashes due to the resistance of the Darug people, leading to farmers taking up the land with Ensign William Cummings being the first officer to establish there in 1799. A former NSW Corps officer and a pioneering pastoralist named John Macarthur bought land now known as Seven Hills in 1801.
The Railway and its influence

Under the design of railway engineer, John whitton, the railway to Blacktown opened on 2 July 1860. This ultimately made Blacktown amongst the first towns in the colony to have a railway connection. The Blacktown to Windsor branch was opened as a proper rail line, after much agitation, this was done four years after the railway opened, on November 1864. As such, Blacktown was now at the very centre of an important railway junction. Apart from building the railway station and a new school, the colonial government took little interest in it.

An 1882 photograph of a train entering Blacktown Station shows the village in its infancy. What appears to be the general store can be seen just behind the station building, but most of the other buildings would probably have been residences. Blacktown may have been a rail junction, but it was still not much more than a whistle-stop on the main line from Parramatta to the Blue Mountains.

A stream train enters Blacktown Station from Parramatta in 1882. The village was still little developed.
[Photo: State Records of NSW]
In 1886 the main western line was duplicated and a footbridge was constructed over the traks in 1912 for safety precautions. There were several timber mills that were manufactured near the railway station as the removal of timber from the district fastened in rate as more means of transportation was now available.

Furthermore, tenders were distributed by the Department of Railways for Iron Bark Timber from locations such as Blacktown. Thomas Fitzsimmons was a major landowner at the time and supplied copious amounts of timber from his property to be cut for sleepers for the Great Southern, Great Northern and Great Western lines. As a result of the removal of the timber agriculture spread over the areas that once held forests.

A train entering Blacktown station portrays the village in its infancy, which is seen in an 1882 photograph. Despite the fact that Blacktown have been a rail junction, it was still not more than a stop on the main line from Parramatta to the Blue Mountains.

Later in reminiscence, and early pioneer named Mrs Leabon identified Blacktown as “nowhere to even have a dance” in the 1860’s. Furthermore, she had stated that out on the Western Road highwaymen still roamed, and there was little more than a hotel, a few houses and scrub in Blacktown.

**Old Blacktown begins to disappear**

The nondescript Blacktown Mall building would be replacing the Warrick Theatre which was demolished in 1964. The mall would have hardly been an ornament to the growing city. As a result, to the demolished theatre, Blacktown would have been without a cinema until the Village Twin open in March 1974.

In October 1969, Kmart was officially opened, which consequently took up approximately the whole block bounded by Patrick, Airds, Newton and Flushcombe Roads. To add, most of the victims of the opening of Kmart were houses, the large Masonic Hall was also demolished. As such, this was the first Kmart in Australia, which was joint venture of Coles and the Kresge Corporation of the USA, which ultimately brought a new format in discount shopping.
On Sunday the 12th of August 1984 the Robin Hood Inn was demolished. It was said to have been done overnight as to avoid local protests, however it was to avoid having to recognise the heritage and architectural aspects of the hotel. State Government offices replaced the building.
Shops and offices, replace the original Presbyterian Church in Campbell Street. Today, medical practitioners are largely confined to medical complexes in a typical fast food environment.

Where buses and taxis shared an island where the originals bus terminal at the foot of Flushcombe Road. The cluster of palm trees where customers waited under, were removed. The palm trees were taken to the tip, however due to protests were returned to embankment of Richmond Road railway over bridge and replanted, where they subsequently died.
The Bowman Hall was built in Campbell Street, in 1966, it was named after Mrs Bowman, who donated the land, which the school of Arts had been built. Today the hall continues as a community meeting and performance centre. However, it’s severely restricted in the latter in terms of its 1960s design and flat floor.

To allow an office building to occupy the site, the Uniting Church in Flushcombe Road was demolished. Under the extensions to the workers club, houses started to vanished. Streets such as Austral and a large part of Patrick, as did much of Westfield Place, vanished under Westpoint.

On the 14th of October 1955, a new railway station and bus interchange opened. In 2010 The Donnellan Place arcade in Campbell Street was demolished, moreover Civic Place park adjoining Council Chambers was also knocked down.

In the December of 1990 Blacktown Public School was closed which forced the students to move to other schools. All the buildings were demolished, except for the historic original structure on Flushcombe Road. The remaining area became a temporary car park, it later disappeared under Westpoint’s extensions around 2003. A result of this extension many peppercorn trees that children had sat and played beneath for generations were removed. A retail institution and one of the longest running family businesses remaking in the CBD, known as Fricker’s Shoes, closed its doors for the last time in mid 2014.

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