

Comet Tales & Walking Trails



COMET RAILWAY STATION 1979

SITE 13



Perhaps Queensland Rail felt that Comet needed a railway station building that was more in keeping with the times. In 1979 a building was delivered to Comet from Many Peaks which was on the rail line from Gladstone to Monto. Apparently, this line suffered the same fate as many other lines in Queensland.

The 'new' building was quite spacious, unlike the single room office in the old station building which had come up the line in 1878 from Dingo. Admittedly the old building had another portion added on but was still quite small compared with this new one. It had, however, served the Comet community for more than 100 years.

OFFICIAL OPENING OF NEW RAILWAY STATION

On the 14th March 1980, the town turned out for the official opening by the Premier of Queensland, Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen. Vince Lester, the local member for the Peak Downs electorate, Cr W McKenzie, Cr C Edmonston, Shire Chairman, and Mr T Keating General Manager, C Q Division of Railways, also attended. The school children and townspeople gathered for the celebration. All were invited to a morning tea in the Community Hall after the ceremony. It was quite a social occasion for our small town.



The Central Queensland News dated Thursday 20th March 1980 reported 'Tom Keating, general manager of the Central Division of the Railways at the official opening of the new station at Comet on Friday outlined some of the railway history of the town.

Comet station open

The Premier, Mr Bjelke-Petersen, yesterday officially opened the new railway station at Comet.

The opening was attended by townspeople and Comet school children accompanied by their teacher.

Other speakers included the chairman of the Emerald Shire Council, Cr C. Edmonston, the area representative on the council, Cr W. MacKenzie and the Member for Peak Downs, Mr V. Lester.

The general manager for Railways, Central Division Mr T. Keating, was chairman for the opening, which was followed by a morning tea.

Mr Keating said "when the rail link reached the town on March 1, 1878 there was a signal cabin and sheep yards and a locomotive shed which housed the locomotive based at the rail head during the period of construction of the line west to Emerald. These facilities have long since gone."

Mr Keating further added, "For some time the Railway Department was concerned at the standard of the Comet station building for its customers and staff, particularly when development of agriculture since the mid-70s was examined, together with the substantial increases in general goods and live-stock traffic."

Also, in the report it mentions that in addition to the station building, Comet railway facilities provide cattle yards and the State Wheat Board has facilities and supporting railway sidings.

THE NEW BUILDING POSES DIFFICULTIES

The disadvantage of the new building was its closeness to the ground. It was mounted on 30 cm stumps. Which meant that the platform was at rail level and not at all suitable for passengers to either step up or alight from the Spirit of the Outback which travels from Brisbane to Longreach twice weekly. An aluminium set of steps to allow passengers to step onto the train was available, but it was still quite difficult for older folk.

However, the station itself was well kept with hanging pots of ferns and pot plants on the verandah. A long timber and iron railway seat for passengers waiting for their train to arrive was situated outside the building on the platform. The grounds were also tidy with a variety of trees and shrubs growing around the approaches to the station. A rainwater tank stood at the rear of the building with a pipe connected to a low pressure tap inside the office for fresh water.

RAILWAY STATION CLOSES

The station operated until June 1995, when the last stationmaster Mr Claude Chalmers was transferred to Emerald. However, trains would still stop to pick up passengers for some time after the closure of the station.

As time passed Queensland Rail decided that it would no longer allow trains to stop at Comet. Passengers had to catch the Spirit of the Outback at either Emerald or Blackwater. This caused a lot of inconvenience for local travellers.

The station was unoccupied for ten years and the building was becoming quite dilapidated when Queensland Rail decided to dispose of the building. The Emerald Shire Council asked the Comet School of Arts Committee if they would like to acquire it.

“Yes, they would.” The Emerald Shire Council very generously moved the building to its new home in the Whistle Stop Park on 10th December 2005. With many working bees and grants the building has been restored and it now houses a photographic display of early Comet history.

RELOCATION OF THE STATION FROM THE RAILWAY SITING
TO THE WHISTLE STOP PARK COMET
10th DECEMBER 2005



Comet railway history

Tom Keating, general manager of the Central Division of the Railways at the official opening of the new station at Comet on Friday outlined some of the railway history of the town.

He said when the rail link reached the town on March 1, 1878 there was a signal cabin and sheep yards and a locomotive shed which housed the locomotive based at the rail head during the period of construction of the line west to Emerald.

These facilities have long since gone.

'For some time the Railway Department was concerned at the standard of the Comet station building for its customers and staff, particularly when development of agriculture since the mid-70s was examined, together with substantial increases in general goods and livestock traffic,' said Mr. Keating.

At Many Peaks of the Monto Line there was a railway station of considerable size and in good condition, but not used because of changed conditions.

There is no railway station-master at Many Peaks and there is only a train service three times weekly. The building was removed from Many Peaks and reinstated at Comet with some additions and improvements.

In addition to the station building Comet railway facilities provide cattle yards and the State Wheat Board has substantial grain storage facilities and supporting railway sidings.

Compiled by Rosemary McLeod, 2018.

Photos:

Rosemary McLeod collection; Robyn Morawitz; CQ News.