

Settlement of the Jerilderie District, and Establishment of the town of Jerilderie

The earliest European settlers to come into the Jerilderie District entered from the east, travelling down the Murrumbidgee River from that part of the country once known as "Australia Felix", the area of Australia between Sydney and Port Phillip travelled by Major Mitchell in his explorations of 1836.

Prior to the Crown Lands Occupation Act of 1836, no settlement west of Mount Bowning, near Yass, was permitted, and whilst that may have been the law, that is not to say that it did not occur, and in fact there is ample anecdotal information to suggest that European presence was in the area prior to that date.

But long before the advent of white settlement, and according to Norman B Tindale's *Aboriginal Tribes of Australia*, the Jeithi (alternative name Yeidthee) Aboriginal tribe occupied the land *north of the Murray River, from west of Tocumwal to near Howlong; north to Lake Urana, Jerilderie, and Lockhart; also along Yanko and Billabong Creeks. Originally they extended farther east but were being displaced by Wiradjuri during the earliest days of white settlement.*

The reference to being displaced by the Wiradjuri (tribe) is significant.

Firstly, according to Denise Hayes, the keeper of the David Kennedy oral family history, and referred to later, they are descendants of the Wiradjuri Aboriginal tribe. Secondly, the *Map of Aboriginal Australia*, created by David Horton in 1996 for the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS), the former Jeithi tribal area which originally incorporated the Jerilderie district, now lies within the Wiradjuri Aboriginal tribal lands.

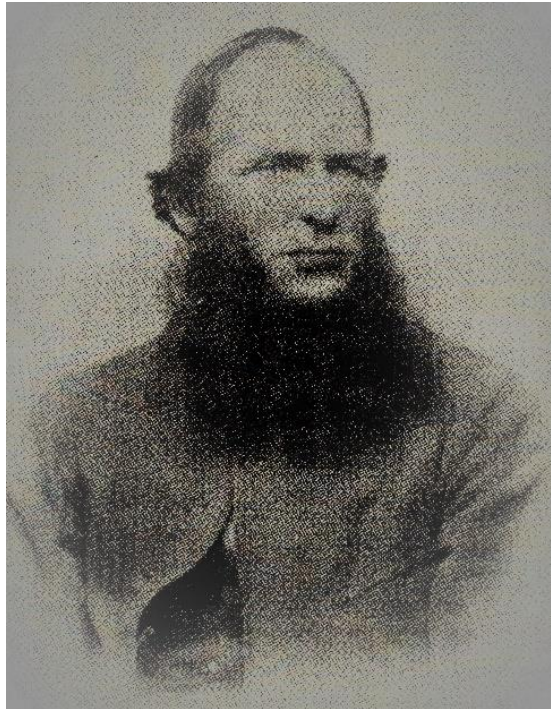
In the early days a custom of many Aboriginal tribes was to adopt (or were given) the surname of the white settler that occupied the lands on which they had for centuries wandered over, harvesting the land. In January 1930 an Aboriginal person by the name of David Kennedy died in the Griffith Hospital, and on reporting his death in the *Jerilderie Herald and Urana Advertiser* on 23 January 1930, it was stated that *he was perhaps the oldest aboriginal in these parts, and was born about 98 years ago at a spot where Jerilderie now stands.*

If that assertion was true, it would make David Kennedy being born circa 1832, long before European settlement of the area was allowed.

Family oral history however, maintains that David Kennedy was born in the mid 1840's, and this is despite David's claim that he was 53 years of age at his marriage to the widow Maggie Purcell (by this time he was also a widower – his first wife dying in 1907) at Whitton on 24 September 1908. The Marriage Certificate also stated that his father

was Robert Henry Kennedy, brother to James Kennedy, the first known white settler to take up land in the Jerilderie district.

But Denise Hayes' detailed research, contained in her 2020 book *My Wiradjuri Warangesda Kennedy Families*, also reveals the Ivanhoe cousins, wherein a James (Jim) Kennedy was born at Jerilderie in 1841, his father listed as being James Kennedy and his mother an unknown aboriginal woman.



James Kennedy established the estimated 80,000 acres Mary's Creek Run, situated on both sides of the Billabong Creek, sometime between 1840 and before March 1847 when the Colonial Government issued Orders-in-Council requiring squatters to enter into leases with the Government.

By the time the boundaries of the various Runs were verified in 1852 James Kennedy had split Mary's Creek Run into two Stations, with the Billabong Creek as the dividing boundary. James Kennedy retained the lease of the 47,760 acres north of the creek, naming it Jerilderie North Station, while William Virgoe leased the 33,190 acres Jerilderie South Station, located south of the Billabong creek.

James Kennedy 1821-1881

Joseph Carne, who claimed that he was one of the first persons to make the track from Urana to Deniliquin, in about 1845, was in 1855 appointed by the NSW Government as one of two Assessors responsible for setting the annual fees payable for leases granted in the Murrumbidgee District. Joseph Carne also claimed he was the first person to take up the *Broomey* and *Cudgel Runs* which in 1850 became part of the Yanko Run leased by William Charles Wentworth.

Apart from James Kennedy and Joseph Carne, the other original white settlers to squat in and around the Jerilderie District, as far as can be determined, were John Drew Atkin squatting on Bundalumla Run, later to become Cocketgedong and Nowranie stations; Edmund Hume Woodhouse squatting on Yathong Run, later to become North Yathong and South Yathong stations, and Messrs Brougham and Woodford squatting on Coree Run.

James Kennedy's brother, Robert Henry Kennedy, eventually settled on the Wunnamurra Run, a "back block", and in 1858 he married his 2nd cousin Mary Bozzom Hume (and a first cousin to Mrs James Kennedy – Annie Hume).

Robert Henry Kennedy
Circa 1890
&
Mary Bozzom Kennedy
(nee Hume)
Circa 1900



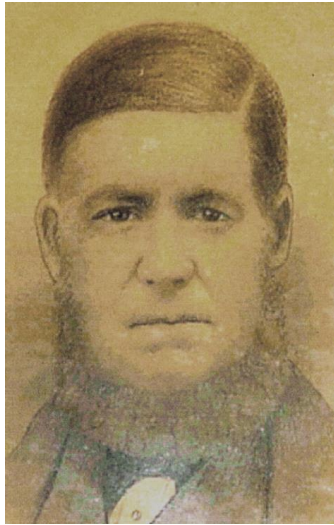
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The beginnings of the township of Jerilderie can be traced back to a travelling draper by the name of John Caractus Powell who, in 1858 built a house and store on the property now described as 9 Powell Street, Jerilderie.

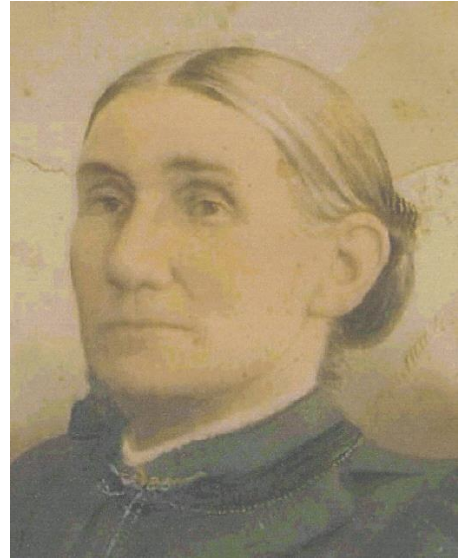
John Powell was the son of Edward Powell, a Weaver, and Mary Powell (nee Jones), and he was born at Bridgnorth in Shropshire, England, on 24 February 1828.

John Powell arrived in Melbourne in 1852 and after trying his luck on the goldfields of Bendigo teamed up with William Lane Wigmore in 1854 to provide a travelling drapery business to the settlers dotted along the Loddon, Serpentine, Campaspe, Murray, Wakool, Edward, Yanko, Murrumbidgee, and Billabong Rivers and Creeks.

On 19 July 1856 John C Powell married Fanny Leek at Upper Plenty in Victoria, now a suburb of Melbourne. Fanny was one of four daughters of Henry Leek (Coal Merchant) and Elizabeth Jones, and she was born on 13 March 1839 at Wolverhampton in Staffordshire, England.



John Caractacus Powell
1828-1901



Fanny Powell
1839-1915

The newlyweds continued to serve the settlers along the various watercourses until Fanny realized she was pregnant with her first child (Edward, born 21 November 1858) and so it was decided to forgo the nomadic existence for one of a more permanent nature.

Some historians have the Kennedy family encouraging Powell to settle where he did, and perhaps that may be so, but not in the manner which readily springs to one's mind when reading such a statement

An article appearing in the *Jerilderie Herald and Urana Advertiser* on 15 May 1914 stated that Powell originally intended to settle in a bend on the Billabong Creek approximately half way between what is now Jerilderie, and the village of Conargo. At this time many "stores" that had sprung up along the newly forged coach routes had rather dubious reputations as to the quality of the merchandise dispensed to the unsuspecting travelling public, but more importantly, to the workmen of the nearby Stations. It was not uncommon for workmen to go missing for days, and so the squatters mostly viewed these establishments with a rather jaundiced eye.

It therefore came about that a relation of the Kennedys "encouraged" Powell to establish his business smack in the middle of William Virgoe's Station, the only parcel of land within a radius of some 60 kilometres, not under the control of the Kennedys, either directly or indirectly through marriage.

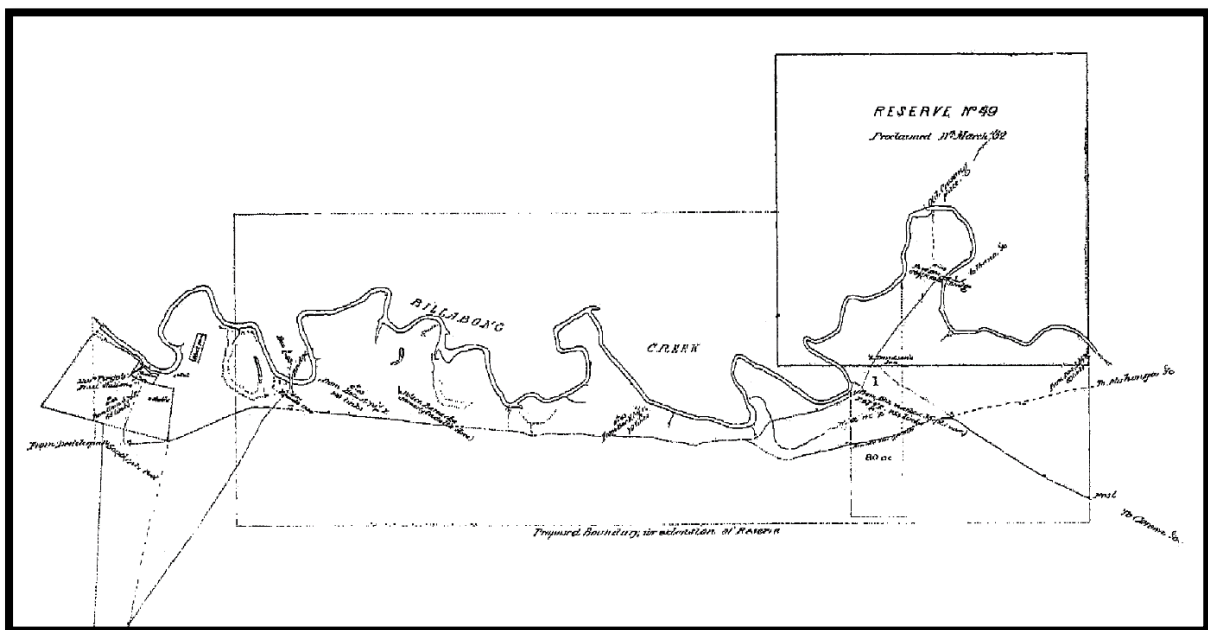
Some eighteen months to two years after Powell had established his store William Davidson arrived in the area from Tumut, and noting the 1852 Survey depicting a likely site for a township, built his Woolshed Inn some 2 miles upstream from Powell, on the

boundary of the proposed village site. Powell responded by opening the Travellers Rest Hotel adjacent to his store, in November 1861.

Davidson then built a Blacksmith Shop. Not to be outdone Powell also built a Blacksmith Shop, on the site now occupied by the Four Creeks Restaurant.

Once again Davidson tried to steal the march on Powell by building a bridge over the Billabong Creek near his establishments, in order to capture the passing trade. Powell had no option but to follow suit, locating his bridge between his Store and his Blacksmith shop, on almost the same location as the present-day concrete footbridge that provides access to the mini-rail complex. Powell's bridge became the main bridge for the north/south bound traffic.

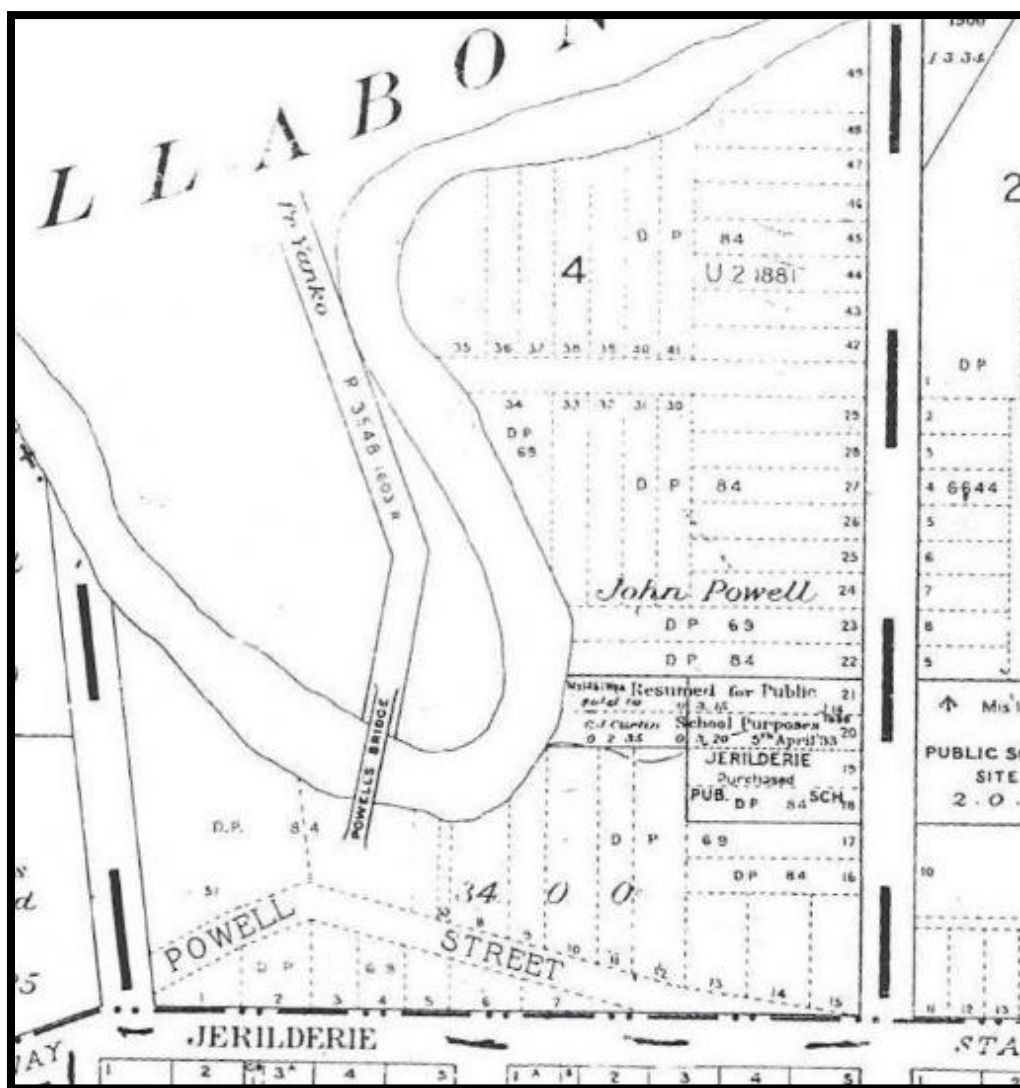
While Powell and Davidson were busily trying to out-do each other, another enterprising gentleman by the name of George Cadell set up shop between the two rival businesses. Perhaps Cadell thought the enterprises of Powell and Davidson would continue to expand toward each other, putting him in a central location! Unfortunately, Cadell's enterprise was not to flourish and he departed the area sometime during early 1862.



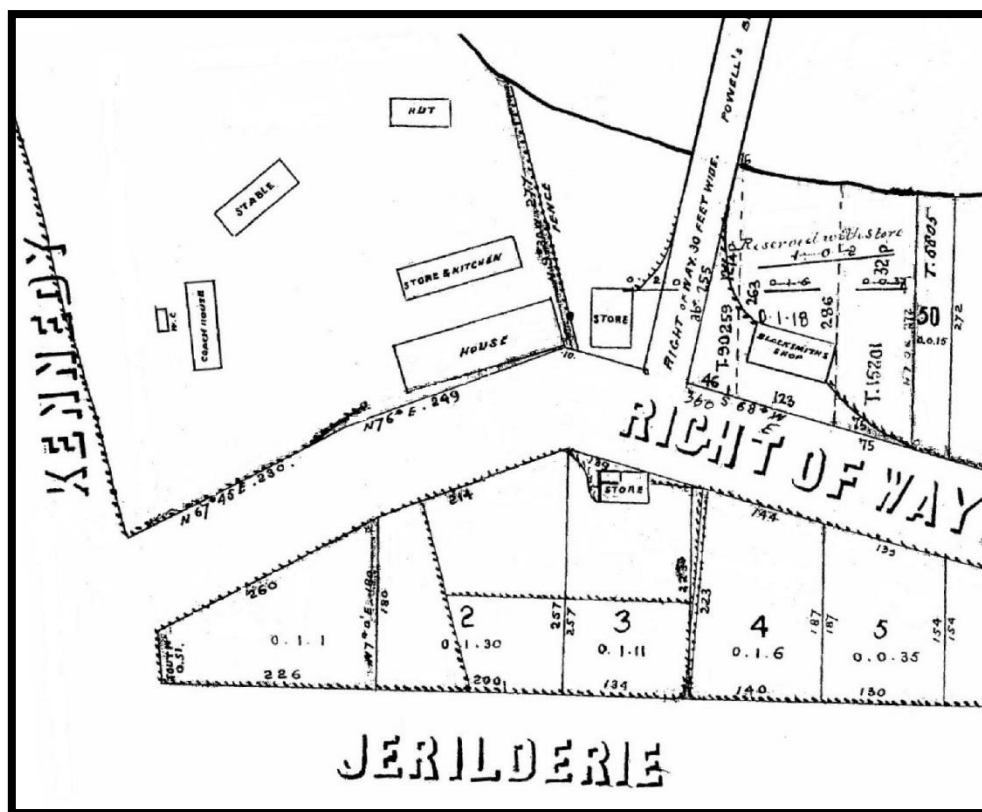
1863 survey map of the Jerilderie district, including the 1852 survey of "a likely site for a town". The map also shows, from L-R, William Virgoe's home station, Powell's store and bridge, and Davidson's store and bridge.

In January 1863 Powell sold his store to the Quin Brothers while at the same time advertising for a good jobbing smith, thus allowing Powell to concentrate on his hotel enterprise.

The master stroke occurred though, later in 1863 when Powell successfully applied for his Land Grant of some 35 acres, and suggesting that land adjacent to his Grant would be a more suitable site for a village. The Government sent James Wood to carry out the surveys and in May 1864 another Surveyor by the name of John McCulloch was commissioned to lay out the town, next to Powell's Land Grant. The first sale of Crown allotments in the Village of Jerilderie was held at Deniliquin on 26 April 1865.



Powell's Land Grant, bounded by Kennedy, Jerilderie, and Bolton streets, and the creek to the north



As the town and surrounding district developed it became apparent that some form of local authority was required to lobby for the provision of services and infrastructure, and so in 1889 the Municipality of Jerilderie was proclaimed. Following the division of New South Wales into 134 Shires in 1906, the Wunnamurra Shire was created, and in 1918 these two Local Government authorities merged to create the Shire of Jerilderie.

On 12 May, 2016 the NSW Government amalgamated Jerilderie Shire and Murrumbidgee Shire to form the Murrumbidgee Council.

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The name Jerilderie has had many different interpretations at different times, but according to the best authorities the word Jerilderie is from the Jeithi (or Wirradjuri) aboriginal word of "djirridhuray", meaning "with reeds", or "reedy place".

L J Henery
Local Historian
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November 2016
February 2021