

RED JACKET CHURCH

c.1865



The Red Jacket Church, photographed in 1937 with its resident, prospector Tom Adams who was using the building as his home at the time.

Photograph supplied by Rob Ashworth, Walhalla.

The Red Jacket Church was built around 1865 under the guidance of Father Courtenay. Father Courtenay conducted all priestly duties indicative of his callings, but was perhaps best known for his work in establishing schools throughout the mountain regions.

Describing his early days at Wood's Point region, Father Courtenay said:

“I have no fixed habitation, but I am like the wandering Jew continually roving, I have travelled during two winters and one summer, 350 miles every month of these seasons, sometimes on foot, and on other occasions on horseback”.

In the winter of 1865 he wrote to the Vicar General in Melbourne:

“Dear Father, this is a wander mission you gave me... Obligated sometimes to swim creeks and deep rapid rivers with my pony, at another time surrounded by a pack of wild starving native dogs, and no later than yesterday having to scramble the best way I could through five feet of snow, coming from Blue Jacket, Red Jacket and Jericho to Wood's Point, about Matlock I found it eight feet deep...”

Even after Father Courtenay resigned because of his failing health, his house of worship was used regularly for church services, then for a short time as a school house, until the population of the town dwindled. It was closed up around the time of the 1914-1918 war.

Whilst researching for this site, an article came to hand written about 1934 by John Stafford, describing Mr Tom Adams, who lived in the abandoned Red Jacket Church in the 1930s. On describing Jericho, Tom stated:

“There were dance halls, wine shanties, everything you would find in all the best and worst regulated gold dumps. Those were the days. See that chapel over there? Been closed for many a year now, so I moved in. Nice and cosy – and plenty of hymn books. Not that I use the hymn books much”, he added almost apologetically.

Source: Rodgers, J.G., 1998, 'Jericho on the Jordan: a Gippsland Goldfields History'

Rudi Paoletti, "Gold for the Taking, A Pictorial History of the Heyday of the Walhalla-Wood's Point Gold Belt, 2007".

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