Information Sheet No. 4

Heritage Services

Geraldton Regional Library

GERALDTON'S HISTORIC JETTIES: THE ESPLANADE AND RAILWAY JETTIES

Over the years, some of the more noticeable characteristics of Geraldton, being a coastal settlement and a major West Australian port, where the jetties that extended from its shoreline. These were used as moorings for boats and ships, and also to fish and swim from.
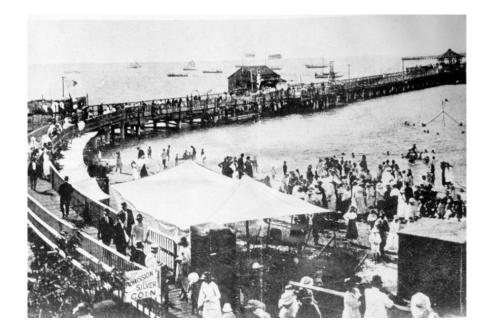
The Railway and Esplanade Jetties, once two important and distinctive features of the Geraldton seascape, have long since disappeared. However, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, they were important features of the town, for both recreational and commercial reasons.

The Esplanade (Promenade) and Railway Jetties, Geraldton, c1890. Image donated by J. Glass, P 4748.

The Esplanade Jetty

The Esplanade Jetty, built in 1857, was Geraldton's first main jetty. It was located at the end of Gregory Street and was also known as the Geraldton Old Sea Jetty, Old Jetty, Geraldton Pier, and Town Jetty throughout its existence. Goods were loaded and unloaded from the Jetty until 1893, when the Railway Jetty was built in deeper water to better cope with the arrivals of large ships. In 1898, the Jetty was leased to the Municipality of Geraldton by the State Government for a peppercorn lease. The Esplanade Jetty then became popular for local recreational activities such as swimming, fishing, gala days, and band recitals which were held in the Rotunda located at its end, until the jetty was demolished in 1944. Unfortunately, over the years the Jetty had become badly damaged and was considered to be dangerous. War time austerity measures led The Municipality of Geraldton to eventually sell the Jetty to the contractors Thomas Jones and Herbert Campbell for the price of one pound. For this price, Jones and Campbell agreed to demolish the Jetty, reserving the timber for their own use.

A gathering on the Esplanade Jetty, New Year's Day, c1920. Image donated by M. Cobley, P 269.
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The Railway Jetty

Geraldton's "Railway Jetty", also known as the Durlacher Street Jetty, Long Jetty, New Jetty and North Jetty, was built in 1892-3. It had become apparent in the 1870s and 1880s that the Esplanade Jetty was becoming unsuitable. Difficulties were experienced with the arrival of increasingly larger ships as shipments of machinery and mining equipment arrived at the Port Town, following gold discoveries in the Murchison area. It was eventually decided that a new jetty should be built at the end of Durlacher Street. When finished, the Railway Jetty was 756ft (230 metres) long, with three railway tracks and a connection to the rail line to Perth. It was further extended in both 1902 and 1909, with its length eventually growing to over a kilometre.

By 1914, the use of long jetties for the berthing of ships was becoming less popular, due to the build-up of silt which often meant that they would need to be extended into deeper water, leaving them susceptible to damage by the weather and ocean currents. Land-backed wharves were the new alternative, and several berths were built through the 1930s. During World War II, the middle sections of the Railway Jetty was destroyed, in order to hamper Japanese efforts if they tried to invade Geraldton (this was also done to the Esplanade jetty around the same time). The last section of the Railway Jetty was finally demolished in the 1950's.

The Railway Jetty, taken from the balcony of the Freemasons Hotel, c1940. Image donated by Buchan P 654.

Compiled from Resources held in the

Geraldton Regional Library's Heritage Services Collection.

References

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