



The Customs House is a private home now but there is a general store open from 9am to 5pm everyday except for Christmas Day. Some supplies are available such as ice, fishing bait and some tinned foods.



OLD CUSTOMS HOUSE



RENMARK

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Contact Details:
Renmark Paringa Visitor Information Centre
84 Murray Avenue, Renmark SA 5341

P: 08 8586 6704
F: 08 8586 5444

E: tourist@renmarkparinga.sa.gov.au
W: www.visitrenmark.com

Old Customs House

As the name suggests, The Old Customs House (under the Border Cliffs at Port Murthoo) was originally established to take some control over the large volume of river craft travelling between various ports on the River Murray.

New South Wales, which claimed the river as part of its colony, built customs houses at its state borders to impose duties on items being transported by river from Victoria and then from South Australia. This caused much dissent and anger with other colonies and they too eventually established customs houses at state borders.

On 8th April 1884, (3 years before Renmark was established) a reserve for a customs house to be known as Port Murthoo, (close to the Victorian border) was gazetted. Customs House was built by December 1884 at a cost of less than \$1000 in current terms.

The Customs House watched over river trade for about 20 years and was served by four customs officers in that time.

Legend has it that river-boat skippers objected to paying their way and often goods were smuggled over the state borders or dumped to avoid paying taxes.

One skipper who objected to paying the then impost of 10 pounds as poll tax on his Chinese cook had the fellow walk through the scrub past customs, supposedly to rejoin the boat further upstream, however the cook never made it back to the riverboat - he was later seen working on a sheep station further North.

At the time duty on a sheep was (in today's money) 10 cents, pigs 50 cents, cows \$2 and horses \$4 - little wonder the skippers objected to paying!

From time to time Customs Officers fired shots over the bows of passing steamers, whose skippers had forgotten to call in and declare their loads.

In 1901, Federation brought an end to customs houses, free trade was allowed between states. The advent of railways to river towns (especially in Victoria and NSW) saw the riverboat trade decline.

In 1902, the Commonwealth Gazette announced The Customs House at Port Murthoo in the State of South Australia was to close.

In 1904, the land was resumed by the Crown and the building was sold to Richard Stoeckel, it became a station homestead.

Richard Stoeckel decided ~~Murthoo~~ was said to be an obscene aboriginal name for animal excrement. It was inappropriate so renamed the building Boundary House and the area Border Cliffs.

Additional rooms were added to Boundary House to accommodate the growing Stoeckel family, a unique cellar, partially underground and a ~~two~~ holeroom (the smaller hole for the use of children) were built.

Only the Southern wall remains in its original condition.

Old Customs House

The Stoeckel family had a long association with Customs House and the graves of some members of their family together with the graves of two children, one a daughter of a Customs Officer, Mr Simms and the other a twin daughter of a Mr & Mrs Nitschke who share farmed with the Stoeckels are buried nearby.

The Stoeckel family lived in Customs House until 1967. During this time Customs House served as a Post Office (later transferred to Paringa) a temporary recruiting Office, and the living room served as a School during World War 1.

In 1967, the Customs House was resumed as part of the Chowilla Dam site. When the Chowilla Dam site was abandoned in favour of the Dartmouth Dam (after millions of dollars had been spent on the initial work, including a sealed road most of the way from Paringa). The Customs House fell into disrepair.

The National Trust of SA was given a 7 year lease at a peppercorn rental with the right of renewal. The Renmark Branch was given the responsibility of overall maintenance but distance proved its undoing. Deterioration was quick.

In 1988, during a cruise upstream in the launch ~~Lady Ida~~ Ted and Ida Van Beukering saw the potential of the Customs House. Ted and Ida moored their houseboat in front and opened a store in the front of the building. Instant success catering to the increased tourist and recreational river trade.

With small grants each year the Van Beukerings worked hard and restored Customs House and the grounds to some of its former glory. They hired out the ~~Lady Ida~~ to supplement their income and in time bought another small houseboat to add to their fleet.

Ill health forced Ted and Ida to sell the customs House business in 1996 to Barry and Wendy Stelzer who continued to upgrade and develop Customs House and surrounds.

They increased the Houseboat fleet as an addition to the General Store and Bottle Shop. The road to Customs House was sealed in 1998, and the adjacent camping area has been developed by National Parks and Wildlife Service with development of a wetlands bushwalk.

The Customs House business was purchased by Peter Teakle in 2004, and he has continued the work of the former owners, improving and expanding the business.

Customs House Houseboats has a fleet of 8 boats ranging from 6 berth to 12 berth and remains the only company moored between Lock 6 and Wentworth, a distance of 220 river kilometres.