

NEWSLETTER

October 2012

Brunswick Valley Historical Society Inc.

# MUSEUM

Cnr Stuart & Myocum Streets MULLUMBIMBY 2482

OPEN: FRIDAY 10 AM – 12 PM

MARKET DAY (3RD SATURDAY OF THE MONTH) 9 AM-1 PM

## The Comedy of Co-operation

W.P. **Condon** staged his usual performance at the half-yearly meeting of the Butchering Co-op in Jun1916. Unfortunately it was only a small audience, the meeting barely getting a quorum, but Directors P.G. **Whittall** (in the chair), T. **Gibson**, R.W. **Bryen**, R.W. **Reddacliff**, G.W. **Slogrove** and P. **Walker**, together with manager M.L. **Campbell** and secretary L. **Lindsay**, provided encouragement. After the Chairman revealed that bad debts had now reached £1545 and reported on an aborted venture into Billinudgel, W.P. *contended that there was no scope at Billinudgel, and it was a preposterous proposal, revealing a lamentable lack of business acumen on the part of the directors.... You are self-elected and have not the confidence of shareholders----- (interruption).... Mr Condon again essayed to speak when the Chairman broke in with- "Oh, for God's sake, shut up!" ....[A mild interlude then took place in which "Damned liar" were the strongest words used. The press failed to catch Mr Condon's remark owing to some commotion.] Mr Condon, in prefacing some further remarks, said he did not intend to make misleading statements like the chairman. (Commotion). The Chairman: If you dare to repeat that statement I will chuck you out myself. It is a lie. Mr Condon: You did make misleading statements. The Chairman, amid a tumult, left the chair and made towards the speaker who above the din reiterated his accusation. Most of the shareholders present left their seats and several intervened and Mr Whittall resumed his chair.... Mr Condon continued to speak. The Chairman: Sit down! Mr Condon: Send for a policeman - if the shareholders don't want to hear me they can go outside.... You have no right to top a shareholder proceeding with a motion which due notice has been given. I give you fair warning that I will proceed against you; it is illegal....*

Meanwhile brother J.D. **Condon** finally had convinced the Tenant Farmers' Union to accept wage slaves as members at a meeting in Jan16. *No man should be expected to work a farm on less than half share. ...what the union was out to do was to bring these people in with them and educate them up to the fact that they were entitled to a living wage and that if they were on a wage it should be equal to about half the profit of the farm....* At the TFU's AGM in Jul16 J.D. pointed out that *...At the last half-yearly meeting of the NCC Company (Norco) the tactics of a few unintelligent persons present to prevent fair criticism of the balance sheet was most reprehensible and savored of cliquism. Tenant farmers should attend in sufficient force and adopt the same tactics, and give them some of their own back. At the Mullumbimby Co-operative (Butchery) meeting something similar took place. This was not a fair way to treat the reasonable criticism of shareholders expressing an opinion.*

At the Butcher's AGM in Dec1916 Mr W.A. **Sheaffe** said they all regretted the absence of Mr Condon.... *The Chairman said he was very well satisfied with the manner in which the meeting was conducted and considered it to be the first quiet meeting they had had for many years....* But in the absence of W.P., brother J.D. **Condon** was carrying on the family tradition out at Main Arm, where, in Feb17, *He severely criticised the representatives of this Riding for allowing the road to get into such a neglected and dilapidated condition....*

At the Half-Yearly Butcher's convention in Jun17 the usual 20 fans of fun fronted up to hear that *...It was a distinct disappointment to the directors to note the lack of enthusiasm displayed by the shareholders...,* but were relieved that Walter **Reddacliff** had borrowed a Condon script to liven things up, performing in front of the Directors, including his father, in disputing Chairman Whittall's boast that they supplied the cheapest meat around the neighbourhood. *The Company was the worst buyer on the market the farmer had....* The ballot for Directors saw his father R.W. **Reddacliff** top the poll with 78 votes, P.G. **Whittall** 77, R.W. **Bryen** 75, D. A. **Kennedy** 71, P. **Walker** 69, J.M. **Sharpe** 55, G. **Kedzlie** 54, while T. **Gibson** and G.W. **Slogrove** both on 53 missed out.

At the gathering 12mths later Walter was still playing devil's advocate, asking *...how it was possible for a local butcher to sell his meat at 2d per lb cheaper than the Co-op. The Chairman: I have heard rumours----. Mr Reddacliff: No rumours about it! I have the price list here....* At the 18th Half-Yearly in Jun19 W.P. **Condon** of Ewingsdale returned to the stage to deconstruct new Chairman G.V. **O'Connor's** report, asserting that *...the Company has failed to achieve the object for which it has been established must surely be patent to all impartial and intelligent men conversant with the co-op business. That the Directors have succeeded in creating profits... by sleigh-of-hand or smoke and mirrors ...small wonder the balance sheet reveals a dwindling output!...*

By 1920 the other Condon had his fingerprints all over most organisations in the district except the august Agricultural Society, which held its annual popularity contest in Jun20, James **Davidson** topping the poll with 148 votes, followed by J. **Lindsay** and J.C. **Morrison** on 147 each. John **Macgregor** came home with 138, placing him 17th in the hierarchy, while J.D. Condon managed 80, insufficient to make it onto the 35 man committee, which embraced new members W.E. **Selwood** (133), W.G. **Cochrane** (120), G.W. **Slogrove** (?), J. **Sherry** (100), E.J. **Hosie** (97), B.W. **Kirke** (97).

At the same time the 20th Half-Yearly meeting of the Butchering Co-op got underway, at which shareholder James **Bridger** of Mullum Creek raised the perennial complaint that manager **Campbell** still wasn't paying a fair price for cattle, which may have been the catalyst for him to resign in Oct22 after 7yrs on the job to take up a similar position at Murbah. At his send-off Chairman O'Connor said *...There was no doubt that it was due to Mr Campbell's able management that the company had attained its present solid foundation.* Thomas **Plummer**, an employee for the last 7yrs, won the job over 7 other applicants.

At the 22nd Half Yearly 12mths later 15 people, inclusive of the directors, turned up to hear Chairman O'Connor express his regret at the small attendance of shareholders..., and eulogise R.W. **Reddacliff**, *the last remaining link of the original Directorate...*, upon his resignation and replacement by J.A. **Walker**. The lease on the premises was about to expire and Mrs Torrens was looking at increasing the rent from £4 to £6 per week, so the matter of buying the place outright was getting urgent. They attempted to raise the capital by issuing more shares, but in the end borrowed £2000 to buy the complex, in addition to John H. **Craven's** 25 acres under Mount Chincogan on which they intended creating new killing fields in view of the Municipal Council's reluctance to let them upgrade and expand on the Torrens' site, which apparently also housed two cottages rented by employees.

By Jun22 they'd built 'up-to-date premises' at the Chincogan yards, but their retail shop was still bogged down in negotiations and new Director James **Davidson** *...in commenting on the report, said it was not very prosperous, and the outcome was very unsatisfactory to the Directors. ...the trading account... showed gross mismanagement for the half-year just ended. The Directors were somewhat responsible.... The statement was misleading.... This state of affairs must cease, else, the sooner the Company winds up the business the better....* Mr **Macgregor** said *It would be a very bad move to let the company pass into other hands. Shareholders should gird up their loins, and make up their minds that the Company would prove more prosperous than ever before....* Two months later secretary W.A. **Davis**

was advertising for a new manager, Archie **Stewart** winning the job from 10 others in Sep22. (Thomas Plummer went to work for A.E. Olive, a competing proprietary butcher now in Stuart St.)

By Jan23 James **Davidson** was the new Chairman and the new slaughter yards were up and running with blood, but *...In order to finance such financial commitments the block*



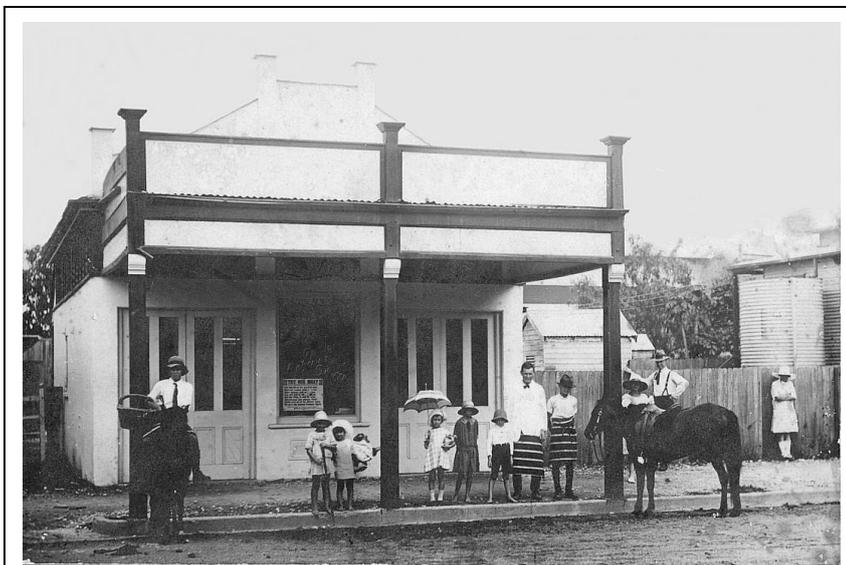
The ex-Co-operative Butchery ~1926 (across the lane from what is now Farm Care. Building left was first Post Office and later the home of Mary Torrens.)

(Butcher Thompson died in Jul28 and in Dec29 Anderson sold the lease to Tom Buchanan, late of Lismore and Bangalow, and subsequently did big things at the Bay. In Sep30 Crompton & Sons gave the place a makeover and opened a new butchery.)

of land adjoining the present shop premises was sold and the company's assets mortgaged to the ES&A Bank..., and your directors urgently appeal for fresh capital.... They'd made a loss of £233/13/5 over the 6mths and ...it was found necessary for a change in management..., but they were still buying from non-shareholders, defeating one of the purposes in setting up the co-op in the first place.

At the 26th Half-Yearly in Jun23, when Mullum was well into the Dark Ages, Chairman **Davidson** advised that *The position to be faced is that the volume of trade is not sufficient to enable the Company to carry on at a profit, and failing increased support your Directors have no option but to recommend the cessation of trading and the ultimate winding up of the Company. Never since the inception of the Company has a satisfactory measure of support been accorded.... Notwithstanding this apathy and lack of support... the assets stand at £2985, having finally completed the purchase of the Torrens site. ...He regretted to say that they had not the whole hearted support of the shareholders - let alone the public....*

In Feb24 Secretary **Davis** resigned and Percy **Allen** won the job over 9 other contenders, at which time Chairman **Davidson** called an Extraordinary General Meeting to say *...now was the time for shareholders to decide what was to be done with the business..., as year after year they showed nothing but loss....* They had sacked three employees since the last meeting and the manager himself was now out on the killing floor. Mr **Barrett** said *"There is nothing said about the weight proprietary firms will swing around the heads of the public if the company does close up."* So they decided to live in hope for a bit longer.



Crompton & Bridger Butchery ~1926  
(Joe Crompton Snr and Joe Jnr in aprons. Charlie Crompton on horse left)

Robert **Newberry** and Joe **Torrens** had opened near the Co-op in Dalley Street; and the partnership of auctioneers Joe **Crompton** and James **Bridger** was about to open in the ex-Olive Butchery further east in Dalley opposite the Court House. The price war that followed gave Mullum the cheapest meat in the region.

The 30th Half-Yearly in Jul25, *...which lapsed on Saturday morning last for want of a quorum...,* finally got underway on 27Aug25 with George E. **Pheeny** in the chair, James **Davidson** having resigned to seek construction contracts further afield. *During the period under review a new firm of butchers had commenced business, and the town was divided up to such an extent that there was little left for any of them to show a profit.... To a large extent apathy of the shareholders in their own concern had caused the present position...,* which was a loss of £129/17/2 for the 6mths and sundry debtors now owing an uncollectable total of £1670/1/10. In Sep25 the business was sold to Anderson & Thompson, the capitalists who had been leasing the Byron Cannery Co-op business for the last 4yrs. It seems they left Archie **Stewart** running their Mullum acquisition and mostly used it as a retail outlet for their large range of small goods.

In Jan26 co-op loyalists made two attempts to hold the half-Yearly and finally got a meeting up which *...was but poorly attended. The Chairman (Mr G.E. Pheeny) presided and said he had no report to make other than that the business had been sold....* And those present voted to drop the word 'Co-operative' from the company name and become a proprietary company. At the same time fellow capitalist butchers Crompton and Bridger dissolved their partnership and Crompton carried on alone.

## Brunswick Valley Historical Society Inc. Newsletter

This newsletter is written by and  
for the members of the BVHS

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Sadie Mudge  
Jennifer Elward  
David Roupell  
Market Co-ordinators:  
Gordon Wright  
Rusty Selvey  
Newsletter team:  
Susan Tsicalas & Work  
Experience Participants  
Public Officer: Susan Tsicalas

### All members are invited to contribute to this newsletter

\*Please leave material with Sarah or  
Liz  
Tues Wed Thur 10 am - 2 pm.  
Or email to:  
bvhs@tridentcommunications.com.au

**NEXT MEETING**  
**Thursday 1<sup>st</sup> November**  
**2012 1.00 pm**  
**See you there!**

\*Deadline for agenda items  
Wednesday 3<sup>1st</sup> October 2012.

**MUSEUM HOURS**  
**Friday 10am - 12pm**  
**Market Saturday 9am - 1pm**

BVHS Newsletter is produced  
by NORTEC Work Experience  
Participants and BVHS Inc.



A week after the mysterious fire in Aug26 that almost wiped out the Anderson & Thompson business, Secretary **Stewart** called for an Extraordinary Meeting to consider the motion *"That it has been proved to the satisfaction of this meeting that the Company cannot by reason of its liabilities, continue its business, and that it is advisable to wind up the same...."* George **Pheeny** said the bank was clamoring for its money and they had no options, as Anderson & Thompson nor anyone else could be induced to buy the business. Somehow they managed to collect £500 of the accumulated bad debts, leaving £1050 to write off, and they'd also managed to bring the overdraft down to £1850, but there was no hope of paying it out. The other bad news was that they were carrying the town property and the slaughter yards on the books with values of £1783 and £1200 respt., while the Valuer-General had appraised a respective £810 and £650. *Mr Barrett said the directors had done their best; but what was the good of co-operation, he asked, if the business could not be made to pay? It showed there had been something wanting, when a proprietary man could start with a few pence in his pocket, and make things pay....* So on the motion of Chairman Pheeny, seconded by J.A. **Walker**, a failed 17yr co-operative experiment was finally taken off life support after a long, lingering illness.  
By Peter Tsicalas

## MUSEUM NEWS

### Storeroom

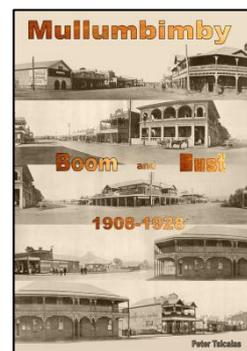
Sarah, our Collections Management Coordinator, is in seventh heaven with our storeroom finished. The new shelving has been installed with special thanks to the Work Experience Project participants; an exhaust fan and power points for the dehumidifier have been connected, thanks to Barry Lomath and now Sarah is organizing the items to be stored within. Luxury!

### Our website coordinator

Unfortunately, Peter Purdon, aka *webdog*, is unable to continue as our website coordinator. He has spent many hours getting our site up and working. We are indebted to his efforts and will miss his humour and his contributions to the museum. Many thanks Peter and we wish you all the best.

### New Publication

The monthly articles by Peter Tsicalas to our newsletter once again have formed the basis for a book; this one is titled *Mullumbimby: Boom and Bust 1908-1928*. The book will be available mid to late October. Price to be advised.



### Reminders

Museum opening times: Fridays 10am to 12 pm  
Market Saturdays 9 am to 1pm  
Monthly Meeting – 1<sup>st</sup> Thursday of the month at 1 pm  
Acquisitions Meeting – 2<sup>nd</sup> Thursday of the month at 1 pm

### Work Experience Project

Check out the timber panels in the shed which have been cleaned, sanded, painted and been given a border. It is looking fantastic.  
The scanning of the Eric Wright Collection continues apace – a huge job. Watch out for the new window display to go in Stewart's menswear. A plasma screen has been installed in the Chris & Robyn Gray room to show dvds, slides etc. Thanks to the participants for their great help & ideas.