



NEWSLETTER

May 2013

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

MUSEUM NEWS

30th ANNUAL CONFERENCE NORTHERN RIVERS ZONE OF RAHS AFFILIATED SOCIETIES

BVHS Inc was the host society for the conference on Saturday 4th May held at the Richmond River Historical Society in Lismore. Stephen Hall, our president, chaired the conference.

The first guest speaker, Kerry O'Brien, related his experience of being featured on the show, "Who do you think you are?" All were delighted to hear that he is a history buff and values highly the work that our societies do in preserving our local history. His talk was very entertaining and informative as were the discussions that followed on the value of history and the effect of technology on preserving current events for access to them in the future.

The second speakers were our members, Harvey Gardiner and Ian Fox, who had us mesmerized with their use of technology to explain the past; an interesting contrast to the discussion of the previous session. Harvey and Ian used old parish maps of the Nightcap Track, overlaid them onto Google earth and then took us on a voyage along the track. As we travelled about 100 metres above the ground, historical locations were annotated and descriptions from early track users read out. The video showed us just how aligned to today's roads a lot of the track is and gave an appreciation of the topography that the track passes through in the Nightcap Range. It was fascinating! Thanks Harvey and Ian for a really great presentation.

The day was wrapped up with each society giving a report on their happenings over the previous year. A very rewarding day for BVHS Inc.

REMINDERS



Membership fees are due for 2013. **N.B. Future newsletters will not be sent to those who have not renewed by the end of April.**

Monthly meeting – 1st Thursday of the month at 1.00pm

Acquisition meeting – 2nd Thursday of the month at 1.00pm

Market Meeting – 3rd Thursday at 10.00am



Peter Basford, Secretary, thanking Kerry for his participation in the conference – a highlight.



Kerry was mobbed with individual questions/requests at the end of his talk



Harvey and Ian making their fascinating presentation

Depression Relief

Sir Walter Massy-Greene's Loan Council was working wonders in accelerating the raising and distribution of cash, the flow to NSW increasing after the removal of Comrade Lang, enabling the Coalition to introduce the Work-for-the-Dole Scheme by Apr33. In May33 Clerk **Inch** advised his employers that *...An increasing number of Councils were taking steps that will enable them to undertake works with persons now in receipt of the dole, by submitting the necessary application to the Minister for Labor and Industry. He further stated that the present dole payments in Mullumbimby represented more than £600 per annum..., and the equivalent sum or greater would be available to be spent for the benefit of the ratepayers and residents....*

But our aldermen procrastinated and it wasn't until late Jun33 that the Star was able to report that the Council *has been successful in having the work-for-the-dole system applied to this area. An amount of £143 has been allocated to be spent over three months. The action of the local unemployed in petitioning the council to have the system introduced is one which commends itself. There are only 12 men receiving the dole in Mullumbimby..., and The amount of money to be received will be in excess of the value of the dole....*

The following week *Mr R. Brownell, Byron Shire Clerk, reported to the meeting of Council on Tuesday (4Jul33) that the work for the dole system had been in operation at Byron Bay and had proved very satisfactory. In reply to a question by Cr **Banner**, Mr Brownell said that the scheme operated for the relief of unemployed receiving food assistance and was not in operation for the benefit of any particular locality. Cr Banner asked why Brunswick Heads was not included in the work and it was pointed out that those concerned in that district were benefitting through the Mullumbimby relief scheme.*

Meanwhile the Bruns Bridge was soaking up some unemployed, but *A public meeting was held at Brunswick Heads on Thursday night (13Jul33), to protest against the action of those responsible for engaging labour on the local bridge, and roadwork. It was pointed out that very few of the local unemployed were engaged, although many have tramped to Byron Bay at different times to seek employment near home, when such was offering, only to be turned down. About fifty people attended, including Cr James **Bower** and Ald C.J. **Latter**. Mr J. **Kunkler** occupied the chair and Mr A. **Lofts** acted as secretary. The matter of dole recipients from Brunswick Heads walking six miles up to Mullumbimby and six back each day to work on Mullumbimby streets, while our own streets remain in a bad condition, was also dealt with....*

Much argument and debate took place about outside labour being sent to the Heads, while local men had to wait - perhaps forever. Various speakers said when they applied to Mullumbimby labour agency, or police station, they were told to apply to the Shire Council and vice versa.... Another man had been told that he was not within an eight mile



Albert Lofts, born 1892 Gundurimba, was a school teacher at Montecollum when he enlisted in 1914. By the mid 1920s he was prominent in local affairs and President of the Brunswick Improvement Committee (formed by the Wakelys in 1918). Into the 1930s he was Secretary of the Brunswick Heads branch of the Country Party, proprietor of the poshest cafe in town and amongst the challengers to Frank Wakely's position as the resort's most civic minded citizen.

*radius of Byron Bay, and was not entitled to be put on. Mr A. **Lofts**: One lot of relief work absorbed £500. Nineteen men were employed, including only two locals. What is wrong? he said; local relief work going on, and still our own men are unemployed. Further, one man who sought work on that occasion had been registered for four or five years. Cr **Bower** pointed out that ex-employees of the Shire, who were unemployed through no fault of their own, had first preference.... It was decided on the motion of Messrs F. **Wakely** and E. **Lofts** "to write to the Minister for labour and Industry, through Mr A.E. Budd MLA and ask him to instruct Byron Shire to give preference to Brunswick heads men for local relief work....*

*Alby **Lofts**, in offering himself as Labour Agent for Brunswick Heads, said that of the nine men engaged on the bridge, none were from Brunswick Heads..., but got no sympathy from the Shire Council, President Cook saying *The Brunswick Heads people... are fortunate that the money is being spent there and should be satisfied. Cr Walker: The whole of the shire has to contribute towards the cost of the bridge, and we cannot give the**

*work entirely to Brunswick Heads people.... The State Labour Agent for the Shire was in fact Clerk Brownell, appointed after the departure of Mr T. Ball, who said ...As soon as the Brunswick bridge was proposed, the Mullumbimby Labour Agent (Harry Stewart **Jerdan**, the manager of the Mullum branch of Arnold **Chew's** auctioneering business and secretary of the Mullum Branch of the New Guard) tried to get the labour engaged through Mullumbimby.... To prevent that I made a clause in the contract with the State Monier Pipe Co to the effect that all labour must be engaged through Byron Bay exchange.... Consideration has been given to unemployed from Bangalow, Byron Bay and Brunswick Heads. Already four men from Brunswick Heads have been given work and another will commence tomorrow. Preference must be given to married men.... I admit that the Brunswick Heads people have been up against my actions right from the start and they think they are the only people who should be considered for the job....*

But thereafter neither Mullum nor Byron had much of an unemployment problem. In mid Aug33 the grant was increased to £243, and at the Mullum Council meeting on 27Aug33 Clerk **Inch** said *There is a falling off in numbers applying for relief and it would appear that the balance of the grant will be sufficient to meet demand...*, and so far £142/12/8 had been spent on wages, *resulting in considerable benefit to the area. Gutters are being cleaned, footpaths repaired and sealed, and roads improved....* In the first week of Oct33 *only seven men have applied for assistance under the scheme, which means that Mullumbimby along with many other towns, is definitely reducing their unemployed...*, Clerk **Inch** adding that the Government wanted to extend the scheme *so as to embrace a section of the unemployed which has, because of the 'Permissible Income' regulations been hitherto excluded from participation. Previously, only those in receipt of, or eligible for food relief, were entitled to be employed.... At present if the fortnightly family income of a man, wife and one child exceeds £2/8/10 per fortnight, the applicant is denied employment...* but the threshold has now been raised to £2/10/- per fortnight....

The good news kept coming and in Nov33 *...The Minister for Labor and Industry (Mr Dunningham) stated that in Casino there were 900 persons on the dole twelve months ago, whereas to-day this figure had been reduced to one invalid woman. Local governing bodies in the district had not applied for the relief scheme because they could find no one to employ under it....* and in some tricky wording, *there are now 111 municipalities and shires in NSW in which not one employable man is receiving the dole...*, because they are all employed under the work relief scheme. Three weeks later when Mr Dunningham's department wrote to Mullum Council with an offer of more money, *The Town Clerk said that very few men were available locally to participate in the benefits....*

The Statistics

This was a big turnaround from the mid year census when 50 men (and 9 women) listed themselves as unemployed, representing a male unemployment rate of 14.6%, compared with a State Municipal average of 27.1%, a State Shire average of 16.3% and combined State average of 23.4%, the last figure reckoned to represent a fall of 9% from the peak in 1932. Byron Shire could boast 213 unemployed males (and 30 females), translating to 8.6% of the male workforce, the second highest amongst the region's shires after Woodburn (11.1%). The shires' low rates dragged down the region's combined municipal-shire unemployment average to 9.2% of the available workforce. The farmers living a subsistence existence in the shires weren't so dependent on earning a quid to buy their bananas, milkshakes and fillet steak.

Mullum Municipality's largest source of male employment was in the shops (21%, exactly the same as in 1921), contrasting with the dominance of the milking shed in the Byron Shire and the rest of the region where a respective 43% and 31% of the males were employed. As for the females, 30% of the municipality's gals enjoyed employment in 'Domestic Service' (compared to 62% in 1921), while Byron's dairymaids made up 27% of female employment in the shire, a big change from 1921 when 49% enjoyed domestic bliss and topped the regional list. Across the region and state the largest source of their employment was a respective 33% and 24% in Domestic Service (49% and 36% in 1921).

The self-assessing Mullum citizens gave themselves a relatively healthy median income per male 'breadwinner' of £115/yr (and £41 for females), above the Richmond-Tweed male median of £92 (£43) and State median of £86 (£48), despite 23 male breadwinners, representing 5.8% of the workforce, claiming they'd earned no income over the past 12mths, perhaps indicating that they'd missed out on eligibility for the just introduced work-for-the-dole scheme, but still getting 'sustenance in lieu'. (Nevertheless, this figure was shared with Murbah and was the lowest percentage on the Far North Coast.) In Byron Shire the median 'breadwinner' income was £86 for the blokes and £40 for the lassies, placing it at the top of the 8 Richmond-Tweed shires, even with 437 men saying they'd enjoyed zero income over the 12mths. Mullum scored 3rd place in the Municipal income race after Murbah and Lismore, and ahead of Coraki, Casino and Ballina. But assuming the breadwinners distributed their income equitably amongst their dependents,

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

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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 6th June 2013
1.00 pm
See you there!

*Deadline for agenda items
Wednesday 5th June 2013.

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

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



then for Mullum it translated to £30/head, the lowest amongst the regional Municipalities and just below the combined regional municip/shire median of £31, but equal to the State median of £30.

The 1362 Mullumites lived in 313 dwellings (including 6 tents), 3 pubs and 4 boarding houses, but enjoyed the region's smallest percentage of owner-occupied dwellings, coming in at 32.9% against the regional average of 38.1% (Byron 38.7%). A comparable town, Bega, capital of the State's southern dairy industry, albeit ~70% bigger than Mullum, shows a median male breadwinner's income of £103, an income of £32/head, a male unemployment rate of 20%, but enjoying an owner-occupancy of 42.5%. Mumbulla Shire, the dairying area just north of Bega where 50% of the male workforce was employed in dairying, had a median male breadwinner's income of £64, an income per head of £23, a male unemployment rate of 17.1% and an owner-occupancy rate of 50.3%.

So all in all Mullum came through of the Depression looking pretty good, despite the farmers protesting otherwise, although they can take the credit for prolonging the region's agony and continuing the reliance on unemployment relief grants. In the township there were no major bankruptcies and the Hollingworth sawmill managed to survive, albeit badly injured, thus preventing a devastating knock-on effect. Dave Hollingworth was known to regularly travel long distances trying to collect debts to pay for each week's wages. He trimmed the business to a lean operation, disposing of the garage business on the corner of Argyle and Prince and selling off the worker's cottages, a symbolic end to what started off as an enlightened social enterprise which could have made Mullum into a 'Labor town'.

The Country Party was quick to claim credit for the region's alleged greater-than-pro rata share of the State's road/infrastructure money, although there's a suspicion that it was issued more as a non-partisan fire suppressant in hosing down the New State hysteria, which again got a strong run through the Depression years. The largest regional work relief scheme was in the Kyogle district, which Mr Dunningham granted £300,000 in Jan33, just after the start of campaigning for the Lismore by-election following the death of Missingham MLA, and headlined as *'Brazen Attempt to Influence Votes'* by the Sydney Labor Daily. At the time of the census in Jun33 the Richmond-Tweed boasted 2398 unemployed males and 375 females, a lot subsequently soaked up in this grand road-bridge scheme, which stretched into the upper Clarence. But the region's unemployment relief schemes lasted through to the war, particularly the on-going upgrade of the Pacific Highway, which saw the completion of the big undertaking to build the Barney's Point and Boyd's Bay bridges to replace the last of the ferries in the Tweed shire in 1934.

And interestingly, the census disclosed that the region's proportionally largest enclave of Presbyterians practicing the Protestant work ethic was in Mullum. They made up 18.6% of the population, against a regional average of 15.1% and a State average of 9.9%. And whilst they were behind the Anglicans on 38.9% and Catholics on 23.2%, they and the fellow travelers, the Methodists on 12.4%, still exercised a disproportionate clout in the town's management. (At 41.4% the Anglicans continued to dominate Byron Shire, the 2nd highest concentration in the region's 14 LGA hierarchy, but with various pockets preaching different dogmas.)

By Peter Tsicalas