



NEWSLETTER
August 2014

Brunswick Valley Historical Society Inc.

MUSEUM

Cnr Myokum & Stuart Streets MULLUMBIMBY 2482

OPEN: FRIDAY 10 AM – 12 PM

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

MUSEUM NEWS

The 2014 **AGM was held on Thursday 7th August.** Your committee have been re-elected except for Jennifer Elward. We wish her a speedy recovery. Welcome to Kim Pedersen, our new committee member, we look forward to your participation. The yearly financial reports are attached.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Welcome friends, members and volunteers to the BVHS AGM.

Reflecting on the past year I wondered did anything really happen at all until I picked up a newsletter (thanks to Peter and Susan Tsicalas) at random and quickly realised that the society is a hive of activity. So much goes on, so much gets done and so many people to thank.

We have just celebrated our 25th year of the markets that included most of the past market managers (Gerard, Gordon and Barry) cakes, activities, costumes, speeches and carry on. Thanks to the weather, new market signage and enthusiastic new managers (thanks Kim and Sarah) our markets have once again become a vibrant meeting place for the local community. Thanks to all our neighbours who have put up with the market parking and general comings and goings.

ABC Open co-ordinator Jeff License helped us in 3 to 4 sessions how to easily make some great little films on quirky aspects of our local history. These have been uploaded to the ABC website. <https://open.abc.net.au/explore/by/57tz2hz>
<https://open.abc.net.au/explore/11tu9ow>

The Mullumbimby Big Picture Show was held in the Civic Centre and BVHS hosted a stall and Susan T gave a presentation on the history of Mullumbimby that was well received.

Due to increased charges of the Crown Reserve where the museum is sited BVHS members lobbied BS councillors. We found Basil Cameron very supportive of our case. Our intrepid treasurer presented our case at a council meeting with a number of supportive members cheering her on. This resulted in a unanimous vote by the council exempting us from many of the intended charges.

Our treasurer has had a very busy year completing various projects including getting Peter Tsicalas's new book called 'Gloom and Bloom' published which has sold like hot cakes, completed a successful grant for restoration of the large shire map, and writing another grant for a documentary of the alternative culture in the Brunswick Valley. Susan was also on local ABC radio re Morrissey snakebite remedy and the history of the museum building; she hosted and spoke to a U3A group as well as many other successful community projects. (She should be knighted or at least get a medal...)

We are involved in the Mullumbimby Chamber of Commerce and its sub group the creative Mullumbimby group (who are looking at beautifying the town including signage and sculptures) and have hosted meetings for both organisations at the museum.

A float with a flock of members in newly designed 'postman red' BVHS t-shirts slowly meandered through town as part of the Community Gardens 'living earth' festival. This will be an annual festival to replace the old Chincogan Festival. We had a well attended information stall in the Brunswick Hall at the Old and Gold Festival. Our patron Frank Mills's seat was officially sat on for the first time; this is an interactive community based project telling some of the history of the area for all those weary tourists.

The Dr Suresh donation finally arrived and is being wisely invested by you-know-who for a new roof.

New displays for the year included 25 years of Spaghetti Circus – posters and ephemera, Wards Emporium, Vintage Dress Ups and a tribute to Dr Suresh.

The Nortec Project had another successful year providing a host of volunteers with a confounding variety of skills, thanks to all those who contribute. Projects included ongoing scanning of the Eric Wright collection, photo restoration, database updating, displays and the far out hippy photo booth- thanks to Jackie Marks

We hosted several successful school visits, thanks to Lorrie Cruikshank and all BVHS helpers.

Thanks to Sadie for her ongoing work accessioning new items.

Thanks to Robby Wright for continuing with her excellent researching abilities.

Thanks to Anne Buckley for her front of house custodian duties. Her reliability and consistency are very much appreciated.

Thanks to Roland and David for their varied work around the museum and machinery shed including restoring the railway equipment and general maintenance; Rotary through John Thompson helping to upgrade our signage; Barry Lomath for his consistent beautification of the grounds; Sean for his ongoing work on Ebay selling surplus goods; and Ken for his photography documenting the markets and assisting with computer repairs.

A big thankyou to Stewart's Menswear for hosting our displays in their window year after year.

And so on, and so on and so on... thank you to anyone I missed.

An exciting new year lies ahead with projects such as Len Hend's mural on the front of the shed, an oral history project on war veterans, beautification of the creek banks and the possibility of a film documentary on the alternative settlers in the Valley.

Stephen Hall, President

Heritage Listing

Mullumbimby's Hydro-Electric Power Station Complex at Laverty's Gap has been accepted for inclusion on the State's Heritage Register, thanks to the efforts of Robyn Gray supported by Richard Crichton (power station 'caretaker' after it closed) and Ray Musgrave (last Superintendent). (Photo Byron Shire News 25 July 2014). An excellent outcome – well done! Information re the submission can be found at

www.environment.nsw.gov.au/heritageapp/ViewHeritageItemDetails.aspx?ID=5060490



Electricity Addiction

By the start of the 1950s the huge demand for electricity was continuing unabated, prompting Engineer **Lehmann** to complain in Feb50 that *"At present we can't catch up on new work and we can't maintain routine work. I'm getting tired of trying to be a mechanic, a labourer and this and that, and I'm concerned about the progress of rural work...."*

By the end of the year the main gripe was load shedding, on-going power cuts being the only solution to keeping the State's grid functioning in the face of massive demand. *Because of the acute shortage of power the 30 per cent cut recently imposed on industries in Sydney will extend to the whole of the interconnected system. This includes, in addition to the Clarence River County Council, Richmond River County Council, Lismore City Council and Casino and Mullumbimby Municipal Councils....* While Mullum was dependent on the CRCC, the CRCC was in turn dependent on the interconnected grid for 25% of its requirements for 14hrs daily.

In Feb51 the aldermen expressed *Regret that Mullumbimby had ever become linked up with the scheme of inter-connected electricity generating systems....* Mayor **Smith** said that *during the recent crisis (coal strike and mining dispute) the district could have carried on with a minimum of inconvenience if it had been allowed to generate and use its own power requirements. For that reason he felt that the ('grid') arrangement was a "colossal failure."... Ald Davies said one of the worst features was that the cost of power was going up because of the increase by nearly 400 per cent of diesel oil costs....*

Clerk **Bourne** said that *At the present time Mullumbimby was feeding back to the system during daylight hours more than it was receiving...,* and in Apr51 reported that *Costs were increasing at a terrific rate, mainly due to increases in wages and the higher charges for diesel fuel..., which had risen to four times the pre-war cost....*

In Oct51 the Council got an early Christmas present when the lobbying of Clerk **Bourne** and Engineer **Lehmann** paid off with the news that *A 920 kilowatt diesel-powered generating unit is to be installed... by the Electricity Commission....* *Costs are to be borne by the Commission provided Council operates the plant for the benefit of the interconnected system....* *The council would be required to feed any surplus power back into the interconnected system and bear its fair share of shedding.*

By Nov51 load shedding was occurring for 4 x 1½hr periods a day, primarily due to the greatly reduced CRCC supply. *The almost complete failure of the hydro electricity supply from Nymboida, coupled with the breakdown of the Newcastle supply... has left the whole North Coast dependent on oil driven generators in three diesel stations, of which Mullumbimby is one....*

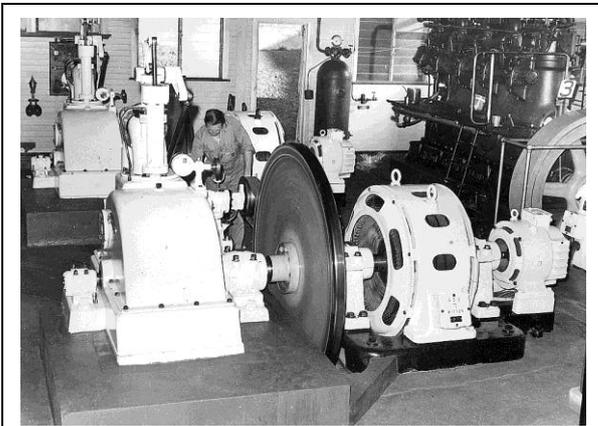
Generation for the 12mths to 31Dec51 was another record, the thirsty diesel engines consuming 247,765 gallons for the generation of 3,729,165 units, the two hydro units providing 1,216,964 units, and the CRCC 2,624,678 units, while

183,702 units were fed back into the grid.

By Apr52 the Commission's generating set was operating at full capacity and feeding heaps more back into the grid, at which time Engineer Lehmann decided 5½yrs in Mullum was enough and resigned to take a job with the Singleton Council. Within 6wks they'd found his replacement in W.S. **Litchfield** from Glen Innes, Engineer in charge of the 'North-West County Council'.

May52 saw the start of rationalisation in regional production and distribution when the CRCC, including the coal-burning Koolkhan power station, was absorbed into the reconstituted Northern Rivers County Council, joining the formerly semi-independent undertakings of Casino and Lismore. Shortly afterwards Mayor **Smith** told Tweed Shire no thanks in its proposal to also form a County Council to take over the electricity supply for the LGAs of Tweed, Byron and Mullum. *"Mullumbimby has spent large sums on development of the district and generation to meet the requirements of the consumers...."*

At the Shire Council Cr R.E. **Walker** disagreed. *"We would be doing something for the people if we were in NRCC. Since 1934 Mullumbimby has had a franchise over Byron Shire but has done little. Being only a small body Mullumbimby had little chance of big loans. The shire should ask to be included in the big scheme where there would be more money for rural work.... Cr J. Armstrong said he favoured Cr Walker's suggestion, but the council should "keep away from the Tweed."* (Conversely, ex-Ald Alan **Gibson** in arguing against rate increases in Oct53 said *electricity to the average householder is cheaper in Murwillumbah with current generated by coal... which is freighted all the way from Muswellbrook.*)



Power Station 1950s

(Ray Musgrave inspecting Hydro Units. Early diesel right.)

In his yearly summary Engineer **Litchfield** reported an 11.8% increase in electricity usage *compared with 1951*, with a whopping 6,694,075 units coming via diesel generation, while Hydro production had decreased by 8.2%. By Jul53, when Council took over the Electricity Commission's *eight-cylinder Mirlees engine and generator...*, 4788 horsepower was being generated by 8 diesel engines at the power station.

Mayor **Smith** in his 'Mayoral Summary' at the close of 1953 boasted that *we have just received a £90,000 Loan which is for the purchase of additional power station plant and for what will virtually complete the Byron Shire electrification.... With a staff on the Council of almost fifty and a yearly pay sheet of £36,000, the importance is obvious....*

The subsidy scheme, which came into operation in 1946 to enable the rural roll out, was paying 50% of the bills and now providing a significant monthly income. And without the Undertaking Mullum Inc would be no more than a glorified Progress Association.

By 1954 the Aldermen were getting a serious cluster headache in trying to squeeze more current out of the existing system. At a meeting in Jun54 the Mullum-Byron Joint Electricity Committee decided that a new 920kw generating set would be a better proposition than taking additional marginal power or beefing up the dam for production of more hydro power. *The additional engine, if installed, will make the ninth generating unit at the power station. It will cost about £50,000 and will lift the firm power rating of the station to 3564kw.*

This decision got up the nose of both the State Electricity Authority and the NRCC, and at a meeting of the three entities at Mullum in Aug54 the SEA *strongly recommended an arrangement for firm power through the NRCC as an alternative...*, as long term there would be a different ball game given the Government policy of steam generation. *Twice during the discussions Authority members asked whether Mullumbimby Council would consider amalgamation with the NRCC and thus overcome all troubles, but local representatives flatly refused to join any such discussion....*

In Sep54, the SEA announced *that a new line would be constructed to supply bulk power from the NRCC which may be available by May next year...* and formally refused the request to install a new diesel generating set. And despite Clerk **Bourne** following up with figures showing that the diesel option would be 30% cheaper than NRCC supply (£40/kwh v. £60/kwh), the SEA remained resolute. (The 66,000 volt power line from Lismore was completed in Dec55).

In Jan56 Engineer **Litchfield** reported that *Overall increase during 1955, compared with the previous year was 12 per*

cent. Total output for the year reached almost 12,000,000kwh.... and will keep on increasing concomitant with the continuing rural roll-out. In Sep56 Council announced that it is now purchasing about 60 per cent of its energy requirements from the Northern Rivers County Council.... And in Feb57 Engineer **Litchfield** presented further stats to the Joint Electricity Committee, saying that since the commencement of the present subsidy scheme, the Mullumbimby Council had carried out rural works at a capital cost of £160,614 to connect 811 consumers.... In town areas the council had 2135 consumers and in the rural areas 1096 - a total of 3231....

Takeover Talk

In Jun57 the SEA formally recommended the consolidation of the Northern Rivers County Council and the Mullumbimby Municipal Council electricity undertakings.... The report concluded that "The loss of direct control of the undertaking may in some cases adversely affect other functions of a small council such as Mullumbimby, but this can hardly be regarded as a strong argument for not proceeding with a proposal for the improvement of North Coast electricity supply."....

Within the week a petition got underway, with big adverts saying it will mean the handing over of £400,000 in assets and £30,000 cash..., which is the personal property of every user of electricity in this area. The undertaking belongs to the people... not the State.... And on 14Jul57 Mayor **Smith** led a delegation to Sydney with a petition containing several thousand names.

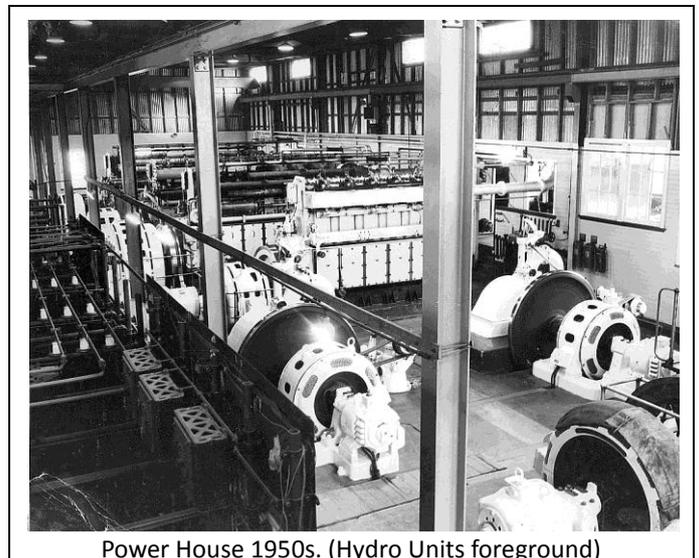
But Minister Renshaw sided with the SEA, prompting Mayor **Smith** to say that it will bring chaos to the local electricity system.... The Deputy Mayor, Ald F.M. **Uren**, said that every citizen must protest against the "socialisation of the electricity system of the State." ... I think it is an attack on our democratic way of life in this community."... Clerk **Bourne** said the Minister now had a statutory obligation to consider objections lodged up to October 23, and if he still desired to proceed, he would be compelled to order an inquiry....

Minister Renshaw duly ordered a public inquiry to sit on 7Jan58. Mullum Council hired lawyer Sydney G. **Webb** QC, the brother-in-law of George **Mallam** Jnr and Dr D.D. **Gibson**, to put their case before Commissioner R.J. Thompson. Witness E.H. Hughes, an engineer with the SEA, said it was apparent that removal of control of the electricity undertaking from Mullumbimby would greatly weaken the administrative structure of the council. "According to representations made to the Minister," he said, "the revenue of Mullumbimby Municipality would be reduced from £225,000 to £25,000 if the undertaking was removed."...

But Mullum-Byron wouldn't suffer under the management of the NRCC, as in the 12mths to 30Jun57 65% of the electricity came from the NRCC anyway. The bulk of the energy generated by Mullumbimby Council was produced by diesel units..., dependent on imported fuel oil. Costs would decrease by supply from the NRCC, which was linked with the main State network.... Giving evidence, Mr S.T. **Stephens** MLA said he understood the NRCC had expressed a desire to take over the Mullumbimby Undertaking... and if they did it would weaken local government structure in the area at a time when local government should be encouraged....

Clerk **Bourne** told the Commissioner that the undertaking was valued at £482,609 and had shown a profit of £9000 last year, of which £6000 was Government subsidy..., adding that the proposal would take the whole financial substance from the Mullumbimby Council and would leave a civic body insufficient revenue or reserve to attract either aldermen or staff....

In May58 Commissioner Thompson announced that upon loss of its electricity undertaking, the Mullumbimby Municipal Council's residual resources will be insufficient to enable it to carry on efficiently as a separate local government body.... Local Government Minister Renshaw then announced that while amalgamation had not been approved, the Commissioner had recommended that Mullumbimby Municipal Council and Byron Shire Council be invited to consider the union of their areas.... Commenting on the question of a Byron-Mullum union, Mayor **Uren** said that possibility had already been exercising his mind. He said



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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

**AGM Thursday
4th September 2014
3.00pm See you there!**

*Deadline for agenda items
Wednesday 3rd September
2014

MUSEUM HOURS

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

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



however, that the question was not one of great urgency and could be dealt with at some future date (which turned out to be over 20yrs down the track).

In Aug58, when it looked like the Golden Beach development, for a projected city of 20,000 people, would change the dynamics of the shire, Mayor **Uren** said Mullumbimby *appears the logical centre for power and water. I believe it would be better for the whole district to have the centre of administration at Mullumbimby. It could form the nucleus of one of the biggest local government centres on the North Coast. I take that view from the suggestion that Mullumbimby and Byron Shire should amalgamate.... We really need a county council right here at Mullumbimby....*

Demand continued to grow and for the year 1959 Engineer Litchfield reported that total output was *11½ per cent higher than in 1958...*, coming in at 16,234,328 KWHs, a huge growth in the 10yrs since 1949 when 5,465,828 KWHs were generated.

The following year growth tapered off, finally catching up with the declining population. Sales amounted to 16,934,978 KWHs, 80% of it purchased from the NRCC, while *Total trading income of Mullumbimby Electricity Undertaking for 1960 was £206,428....* And for the first time ever, 1962 saw the Undertaking come in with a decline in output of 2.42%, which Engineer Litchfield attributed *to the loss of sales to beach mining companies since last year, warmer weather, and a slack season for the whaling industry. He said the removal of the Public Works Department quarry plant from The Saddle (upon completion of the Brunswick Harbour Scheme) had also affected sales....*

Cr Jackson of the Byron Shire put things in perspective in Apr63, saying *A decline in electricity sales by Mullumbimby Municipal Council last year seemed typical of the whole of the North Coast...*, as the decline had resulted from the fact that *dairy farms were going to beef and local industries were going downhill....* Nevertheless, *Total output for the year 1963 was 17,949,832 units...*, and *Total income reached £271,117....* Things continued to improve with *an upsurge in sand mining...* and by Jul66 Engineer **Litchfield** was claiming that *Unexpected mining loads scheduled for Byron Bay have made the construction of a second electricity feeder to the area an urgent necessity....*

At a Brunswick Heads dinner in Jul66 to mark the 40th anniversary of the undertaking *the Minister for Local Government, Mr P.H. Morton, said... Mullumbimby Electricity Undertaking was unique in the whole of Australia.... He said rural electrification had been a feature of activities and it was recorded that only 15 farms out of a total of 900 in the area were now without electricity. "Although you have no vast projects to point to, you have an enviable record of service and this must be one of the finest examples of self help by any local government body in NSW.... The function was also attended by Stephens MLA, Anthony MHR and a heap of other heavies.*

Despite the growth at Ocean Shores, into the 1970s there was a dramatic drop in demand when the sand miners packed up, introducing a new ball game. Peter Tsicalas



Monthly meeting – 1st Thursday of the month at **3.00pm**
Acquisition meeting – 2nd Tuesday of the month at **10.00am**
Next Market – **Saturday 16th August**
8am-2pm

