



Brunswick Valley Historical Society Inc.

MUSEUM

17 Myokum Street MULLUMBIMBY 2482

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OPEN: TUESDAYS & FRIDAYS 10 AM – 12 PM

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

NEWSLETTER

August 2021



UPDATES

The **Annual General Meeting** is on **10th August 2021** at 10:30. All members invited to attend. All positions are available. Please consider joining the committee.

The Work Experience Project is up and running as of 10th July. **Frederick Theiss** is supervising the program.

William John Reilly, a Progressive Pulpitarian

In sifting through the pages of the *Mullumbimby Star* the average truth-seeker is likely to conclude that Catholic Irishman **W.J. Reilly** was Mullum's leading activist against sectarianism, making him a front runner for a community peacemaker award. He was born 1847 Dublin, the son of **Thomas** and **Mary**, nee **Byrnes**, and *early in life took to the sea.... He left England in the steamer Richmond (the original boat trading to the rivers bearing that name) in the year 1873, as second officer, and after arrival in this colony continued in the coastal trade for some time, being second officer on Messrs Nipper and See's steamer Lubra....* So said his pitch to the punters in Sep1908 upon nominating for aldermanic honours.

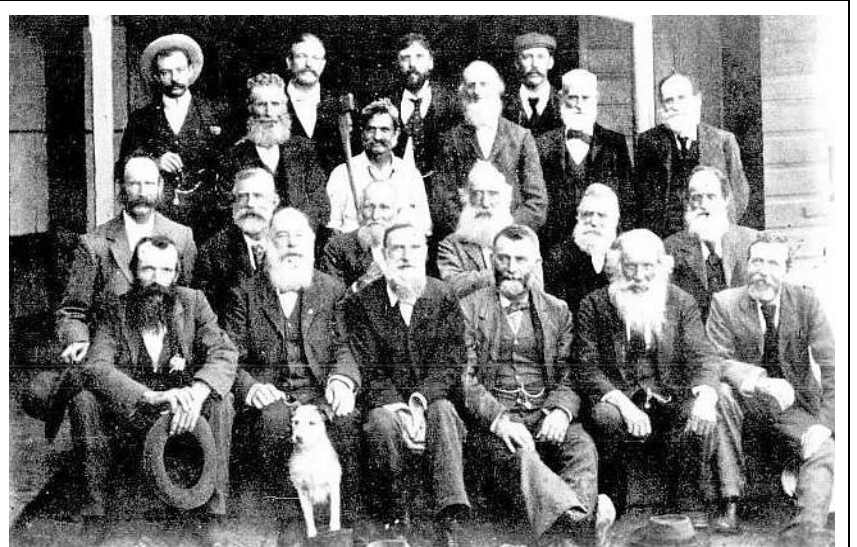
(The most likely *SS Richmond* was a cargo ship (launched 1871 England) that sank off the town of Vigo in Spain 24Nov1878, apparently having departed Australia Oct1878. The first *SS Richmond* trading as a coastal steamer between Sydney and the Northern Rivers was built 1878 Dundee, Scotland, for **G.W. & B.B. Nicoll**, and drowned off Port Macquarie in 1884, at which time she had been in the hands of **John See** for the past 3yrs. The *SS Lubra* was built 1874 Hayle, Cornwall, and acquired by **Nipper & See** upon arrival Sydney 1876. She traded mostly from Melbourne to Victorian ports until 1878. Thereafter she was a regular on the Clarence run until sold to the *Newcastle and Hunter Steam Ship Company* in Oct1880, which was probably the prompt for seaman Reilly to become a landlubber.)

He won his Aldermanic seat and served 9yrs on the Municipal Council until missing out on re-election in Jul1917. On two public occasions in 1915 he said that his first visit to the Brunswick was in 1872 *for a cargo of cedar and they did not see a living soul....* He scored a Testimonial and 'Illuminated Address' on 29Apr1918 and repeated the 1872 Bruns arrival date, adding that *About that time he had had three trips from Sydney, and it (Brunswick Heads) was very little disturbed by the hand of man. He had sailed to many parts of the world, but he afterwards traded on the coast between Sydney and the Manning, Bellingen, Richmond, Macleay and the Brunswick and Tweed. While engaged at this he was on the look out for a place where he would not have to spend the last of his days at sea. He had seen many places, but he always had a good opinion of the Brunswick. After he had selected in '81 he soon found out that he was going to have a family....*

His obituary of 15Mar1923 notes that *In his early youth he followed the occupation of a sailor, and in that capacity made two trips to Brunswick Heads in a sailing vessel in 1872. On the occasion of his first visit there were only three white men at the Heads; and on his second visit twelve months later he met the only white woman there – Mrs Robert Marshall, who with her husband kept the first hotel at the Brunswick. Impressed with the potentialities of the Brunswick district Mr Reilly determined to return, and marrying in Sydney in 1880, he carried out his intention by returning with his wife (then only a girl of nineteen) and a baby in 1881... and selected 40ac on 'Reilly's Hill' overlooking the future village of Mullumbimby. [On 5Jul1881 his wife **Bertha Augusta**, nee **Slycart/Schlieart/Schleichert/...**, introduced their first son, **William John** (aka John William) **Reilly**, to the world, celebrated with a Catholic baptism in St Patrick's Church at The Rocks, Sydney, the following day. Their next child, **Bertha Therese Reilly**, was born 1883 Mullum and credited as the first full-blood white female born on the Brunswick. (Bertha Snr was born 1862 Hamburg, Schleswig-Holstein, Germany, the daughter of **John Amos Schlieart** and **Charlotte Jonae**, and was 5 mths old when the family landed in Australia.)]*

In the Aldermanic biographies published as a guide for the Mullum selectors in Sep1908 it was stated that **Mr Reilly** was one of the prime movers in the establishment of the Brunswick Heads Progress Association in the eighties, and on the advance of Mullumbimby the headquarters of that body were removed here, and the name changed to the Mullumbimby Progress Association..., of which he has filled the presidential chair on several occasions – in fact he holds that position today....

In the report of his 1918 Testimonial speech He claimed to have started the first Progress Association on the rivers..., at Brunswick Heads. There were no roads to get through the bush so he thought something should be done. Mr **J.B. Kelly** was the surveyor in those days, and the speaker, not being possessed of too much ability at the time, he approached Mr Kelly, with the result that he called a meeting at Brunswick Heads. He could see before him that night some men in the persons of Messrs **J. Macgregor** and **P. Nelson**, who joined the Association with him. Mr Kelly was made secretary, and the first letter they wrote they received a reply. The result of this was that he (Reilly) was put on as a maintenance man, and he brushed the first road through Brunswick, Coorabell and Main Arm....



Pioneers Reunion, Ballina, 15May1902

Rear: Thomas Duff, Wardell; M'Clure, Ballina; Unknown; Jimmy Exton, with the axe; Thomas Russell jnr; **Charles Jarrett**, Ballina; R.C. Smith, Ballina; **H. French**, Mullumbimby; **T.G. Hewitt**, Northern Star, Lismore.
 Middle: Joseph M'Guire, Tintenbar; **Robert Marshall**, Brunswick; **Lemmel Snow**, Bangalow; Vincent Norris, Lismore; **Boyd M'Curdy**, Ballina; Fisher, Woodburn. (Lemuel Grigg Snow was born 1816 Connecticut, USA).
 Front: **W.J. Reilly**, Mullumbimby; **D.W. Munro**, Ballina; Thomas Russell Snr., Ballina; George M'Lean, Coraki; C. Bowers, Ballina; Thomas Borton, Lismore.
 At the reunion Mr W.J. Reilly, Mullumbimby, said... He went to the Brunswick River in 1873, having first come to the Richmond shortly after landing from the old country.... (Courtesy Sydney Mail of 7Jun1902)

The first record of formation of a local Prog Assoc appeared in the Northern Star on 2May1883, reporting that a well-attended meeting of selectors and residents... at the Heads unanimously agreed to form themselves into an association for the purpose of memorialising the Government in regard to effecting the improvements required by the place.... **Robert Morrison Crabbe** had initiated the meeting with an advert in the edition of 14Apr1883, while **John Lund** was the first recorded secretary of the resultant 'Selectors and Settlers Association of the Brunswick River'.

On 23Aug1883 a meeting of sugar-growers, farmers, selectors and others was held at **Eli Hayter's** place near Byron Bay, at which Catholic **Kelly** of Tyagarah proposed That an Association be formed, called 'The Byron Bay Association', which was carried unanimously by the attendees. If Elder **Reilly** wasn't suffering a senior's moment, then it seems the Bruns Prog Assoc he alluded to was an earlier organization that went belly up, probably after Kelly sniffed the wind and shifted camp when Byron Bay started to gain the ascendancy. **John Lund** subsequently became a member of the Byron Association, which went from strength to strength while the Brunswickians slowly fragmented. [Check for clues in the Kelly story at [81.-Newsletter-February-2019.pdf \(mullumbimbymuseum.org.au\)](#)]

At a meeting of the moribund Brunswick Association at Marshall's Pub on 17Oct1885, chaired by **Henry French**, also a member of the Byron Association, they discussed the Brunswick River Association amalgamating with the Byron Association. It was proposed and carried that **Mr John M'Gregor, Mr Matthew Chisler, Mr William Law, and Mr R. Smith**, be appointed a deputation to attend a meeting of the Byron Bay Association on 24Oct1885, at **Mr Jarman's** at the Byron....

At the Byron Association meeting **Chairman Kelly** explained... that (Brunswick) representatives had been appointed to lay before this committee certain proposals by which a union might be effected if we could come to terms.... But they weren't about to surrender sovereignty, as it was agreed not to alter the name of our Association or add thereto.... Unaware of this resolution, **Mr Nelson** (who was the chief spokesman for the Bruns delegation) said that it was desired that the Association when amalgamated, was to be called "The Byron Bay and Brunswick Association"; and that every alternate meeting was to be held at the Bay and Brunswick.... He fully admitted that the Byron Bay Association had done much good, but unless the committee would agree upon the above terms, nothing could possibly be done.... Negotiations broke down and the two groups went their separate ways with divergent agendas, notably the priority of public works.

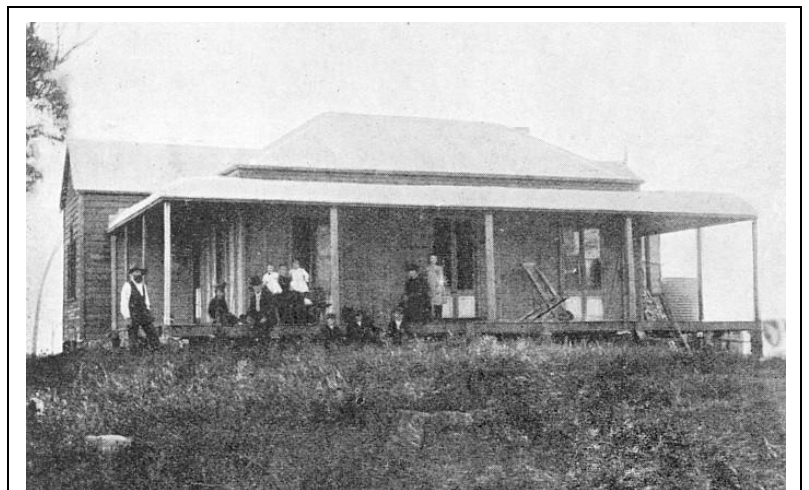
Reilly's first appearance in the local press occurred in Jun1883 when he officiated at the burial of **Mrs Thomas Torrens**

(nee **Ellen O'Brien** of Co Limerick, the Catholic wife of Protestant Irishman Thomas) at Brunswick Heads. But thereafter the written record indicates he kept a low profile on civic matters until Sep1890 when he argued the case for the 'Mullumbimby Deviation' on behalf of the new Mullumbimby Progress Association, which had appeared on the scene in 1889. This fiddling with the railway route put him at odds with his mate **John Macgregor**, President of the Brunswick River Progress Association, who continued to argue the case for the precedence of Brunswick Heads port improvements. In Apr1895 Reilly was elected treasurer of the Mullum Prog Assoc, of which Macgregor had become a temporary member after Brunswick was taken off life support. (Revisit the death and ascendancy of the respective Prog Assocs at [103.-Newsletter-February-2021.pdf \(mullumbimbymuseum.org.au\)](#).)

Then he became regular news fodder, dutifully attending meetings and continuing as treasurer into the new century. But the organisation was still a bit shaky in Mar1903 when he was elected president, at which time the bank account had dwindled to 7/11d, perhaps the episode alluded to by Reilly in his testimonial speech of Feb1918, referring to *the time they only had seven members... and they had a deficiency of 7s, but they made this up somehow* (by tossing in two bob each). *From the time Mr Morrison took on the secretaryship they had done wonders, and a lot of credit is due to Mr Morrison, who held the position for 13 years....*

His Prog Assoc experience saw him selected as a Mullum delegate (along with **Charlie Simpson**) to the momentous meeting at Bangalow in Apr1906 that nominated provisional councillors for the proposed Byron Shire. At that meeting, attended by representatives from the 11 Progress Associations within the boundaries of the planned shire, he made a convincing argument for Mullum to become the shire capital, but, alas, **David Jarman's** vision for Byron Bay won the day. [But not to be outmaneuvered, Mullum Prog Assoc separately recommended to Government that *"That the name of the new Shire be changed to Mullumbimby"*. This was given short shrift and Mullum subsequently went its own way as a sovereign state, in the meantime meandering rudderless within the new shire without the financial benefit of 'Urban Area' status. Refresh your memory on 'Local Government Machinations' at [102.-Newsletter-Dec-2020-Jan-2021.pdf \(mullumbimbymuseum.org.au\)](#).]

Reilly's absence from the public stage in those early years was more than likely due to his remoteness in the scrub. His 1923 obituary records that his *first selection was a small one of 40 acres, adjoining the township of Mullumbimby on the site now known as Reilly's Hill* (portion 23 of 40ac in 1881, followed by adjacent P22 of 40ac in 1882 and P35 of 40ac in 1883, Parish of Billinudgel). *The first home was a slab hut on the bank of the river near the old crossing...*, but through most of the 1880s he was out in the bush making *his living by scrub falling...*, when not employed as a *maintenance man* on the roads. He then *selected some two hundred acres at Main Arm* (portion 53 of 100ac in 1889, P54 of 170ac in 1891, P56 of 45ac in 1896, all adjacent near the confluence of the Main Arm and Blindmouth Creek, Parish of Mullumbimby), the access to which was difficult as *There was no road, only bullock tracks.... Arriving at Main Arm another slab hut was built...*, from where **Mrs Reilly** only paid one visit to "town" in six years.... They were beaten by the Depression and surrendered to the bush in 1897, moving back to the original selection where they later built a new house dubbed 'Avontine'. In 1916 they retired into town (where 2 blocks were acquired in the first auction of 1888).



W.J. Reilly's residence 'Avontine', perched on 'Reilly's Hill', behind the Catholic Church and overlooking Mullum, 1906.

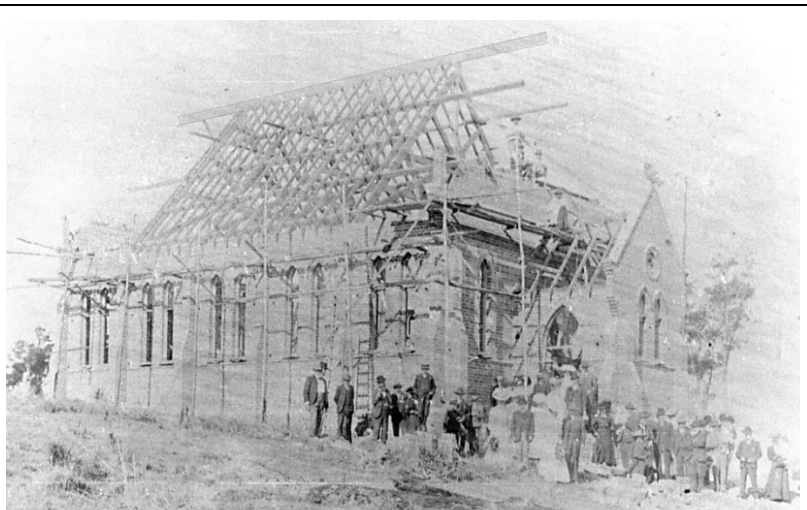
His sphere of interests widened in Apr1899 at a public meeting of dairymen at the Mullum School of Arts when he moved *"That those present form themselves into a dairymen's association, to be called the 'Brunswick River and District Dairymen's Association'...*, of which he served on the Executive Committee and acted as chairman on a couple of occasions. In Aug1901 this evolved into the *Mullumbimby Farmers and Dairymen's Progress Union*, of which he continued serving as a committeeman. He was still enamoured with cows in Jan1904 when he became a trustee of the showground and in Mar1905 a foundation committeeman with the Agricultural Society, of which he was a vice-president by Nov1907. In Jul1916 he became foundation treasurer of the Mullum branch of the *Primary Producers Union (PPU)*, which superseded all other cow organisations.

He was also on the executive committee assembled to organize the opening of Federation Bridge on 24Mar1901. After stirring words by **Henry French** and **Thomas Ewing MLA** on the wondrous future for the Brunswick district, the platform

was handed over to **Mrs W.J. Reilly**, Mullum's oldest female, who christened the structure '*Federation Bridge*' with a bottle of champers.

In May 1903 he was one of the residents dubbed the '*leading citizens*' who greeted the Governor upon arrival in town, signing the formal address that begged *to assure you of our unabated loyalty to our Sovereign Lord the King...*, probably generating a bit of cognitive dissonance with his Irish 'home rule' baggage. In Aug 1904 he purchased the old School of Arts building and converted it into a residence for **Rev Hain**, the Presbyterian clergyman currently living 4mils out of town at the Myocum Manse. In Oct 1904 he and **Cornelius O'Brien**, nephew-in-law of Protestant **Thomas Torrens**, formed a Mullum branch of the *Hibernian Australasian Catholic Benefit Society*. At the laying of the foundation stone for the new Catholic School in May 1906 **Bishop Doyle** said *He was pleased to see present, Mr Reilly, whom he designated Mullumbimby's First Mayor.... Mr C. O'Brien proposed the toast of "His Lordship Bishop Doyle"...*, while his schoolteacher sisters, **Kathleen** and **Margaret O'Brien**, provided the organ and choral music.

In Sep 1906 Irish Envoys Donovan and Devlin visited Mullum on a money raising mission to fund the campaign for Home Rule. *Within a very few minutes of their appeal £33/16/9 was subscribed...*, and collected by treasurer **Reilly** of the committee chaired by **Con O'Brien**. (At the 6th anniversary celebrations of Mullum's *Loyal King Edward Orange Lodge* in May 1907, Northern Irishman Rev **Richard Dill Macky**, who relieved **Rev Hain** in 1905 and elected to live in the Myocum Manse, said *Home Rule meant Rome Rule, and the Ulstermen would have to become Roman Catholics to be allowed to live in Ireland and hold farms.... Ulstermen said they would have no Popery, no matter what the result be....*)



Bertha Teresa Reilly scored another first upon her marriage to **Daniel Patrick Healy** in the unfinished St John's Catholic Church 7 Aug 1907.

Bishop Doyle returned to open the new Catholic Church on 17 Nov 1907 and after *the toast of "The Pope and the King"...* said *It was not long since, when to ride from Lismore to the Tweed he had to go through the Big Scrub, and not a ray of sunshine would light upon him, so dense was the scrub. The old cedar-getter's track was there, and it had to be followed.... At that time you could walk across the Brunswick Heads at low tide.... Reilly, he thought, was the first settler there, and so hard was he to find that he had half-a-dozen children for baptism before a priest was able to make his way to the place.... And Reilly said that one of his proudest boasts was that every denomination helped one another in Mullumbimby....*

The *Mullumbimby Branch of the Catholic Federation* was formed in Jan 1914, with **Reilly** a foundation committeeman and his daughter **Molly** assistant secretary. This organisation was brought about *for the purpose of defending Catholics against injustices...*, and *is no sectarian organisation, it does not foster bigotry; its objectives are purely defensive...*, but seemed to have a political aim of lobbying for State Aid to Catholic Schools, and perhaps a counter to the activities of the Protestant Defence Association (PDA), the Mullum branch of which was formed by **Rev Dr William Marcus Dill-Macky** (brother of Richard) in Mar 1903. [The political machinations of the regional PDAs, combining under the umbrella of the Protestant Federation, stepped-up in the early 1920s with large adverts in most regional rags warning of the *Vaticanisation of the Labor Party*.... Narrowly focused stories on Mullum's early religious history are at [86.-Newsletter-July-2019.pdf \(mullumbimbymuseum.org.au\)](#) and [34.-Newsletter-October-2014.pdf \(mullumbimbymuseum.org.au\)](#)]

Reilly had a left-leaning political posture, although seemingly more upright than the general stance of his co-religionists. After the inaugural Municipal Elections of Sep 1908 he found himself a member of the ruling Labor clique, although sharing the Aldermanic benches with 4 Presbyterians and 1 Methodist. At the 2nd Municipal election of Jan 1911 the Council retained its pink tinge, Aldermen **Reilly**, **Hollingworth** (Presbyterian), **Stewart** (Presbyterian) and **Nelson** (Anglican) making up the executive of Mullum's *Political Labor League*.

He was a foundation member of the committee formed in Oct 1916 *to make arrangements for the running of the coming referendum in favour of conscription...*, putting him in opposition to the general anti-conscriptionist stance of his fellow Catholics and Laborites. But he was on the right side of the debate, the Mullum sub-division voting 65% Yes to Conscription, versus 60% Yes across the Richmond Electorate and 57% No for the rest of NSW.

James Davidson, also on the Conscription committee (and foundation treasurer of the Mullum PDA), resigned the Mayoralty in Feb 1917. His Deputy Mayor, **Ald Reilly**, was considered a shoo-in as the next incumbent, but he declined the

honour and nominated Presbyterian **Ald Morrison**, who got the collective nod. Reilly lost his aldermanic seat at the Council elections of Jun1917 due to a coup by the *Ratepayers Association*.

Following his Apr1918 Testimonial, at which his memory appeared to suffer a few more senior's moments, the 73yr old progressively withdrew from community affairs. Nor did he re-nominate for the presidency of the Progress Association at the AGM of Jan1919.

Towards the end of 1922 economic forces were pointing towards a gloomy future for Mullum, and on 23Nov22, just 9 days out from the Council elections, the Star asked *Who and where Are They? Where are the candidates for Aldermanic honors.... it would seem that either that fatal lethargy so peculiarly Mullumbimby has already seized them, or else that the ratepayers are too obtuse to appeal to. How different to the "good old days" when Mullumbimby first sought incorporation as a municipality, and such orators of local fame as our grand old pioneer, Ex-Ald Reilly propounded his views from public balconies!....*

The 76yr old's death in Feb1923 was a major loss to the community. *Deceased, who was held in the highest respect by all, was ever to the forefront in every movement that had to do with the progress of the town and district.... The name of Reilly is indissolubly bound up with the Brunswick's early history, and the hill which takes his name, overlooking the pretty township of Mullumbimby will ever serve as a reminder of one of that noble band of early settlers who blazed the trail....*

Wife **Bertha**, who 'blazed the trail' with him, *passed to her long home* 1941 Mullum aged 78. She was *Possibly the last of the courageous pioneers in the Brunswick district...*, and *With her death the final link in the historical chain of early settlers has been removed....* [Daughter **Bertha** (Mrs Dan Healy), *After living all of the 71 years of her life in the Brunswick district...*, died in her hometown 1953, aged 70.]

(Note: This story supplements and overlaps that at <https://www.mullumbimbymuseum.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/2.-Newsletter-October-2011.pdf>. And given the 'Livingstone Bridge' fiasco, we have refrained from suggesting to Council that the worthy Reilly be memorialized with another dedicated landmark, now that 'Reilly's Hill' has faded from corporate memory.)

Peter Tsicalas



Reilly Clan 1906

Rear L to R: Eddie (d. 1909), Molly (Mrs John Devereaux 1915), John (d.1918), Bertha (Mrs Dan Healy 1907), Tom.

Centre: Harry, Vincent on knee of William John Reilly, Alicia (Mrs Greg Halpin 1925) on knee of Mrs Bertha Reilly (nee Schlicart), James.

Front: Dan, Kathleen (Mrs Michael Condon 1920), Joseph.

OBJECT OF THE MONTH

The stall, **Coffee Oasis**, owned by **Greg Vail** was the feature for July. Greg has been a supporter of our market since its inception. Starting off by helping Yusuf Goldhawk on his stall and then purchasing it. He has been a strong supporter of the market. Greg for many years has organised the busker each month. It was our delight to feature Greg and his stall as he will be sorely missed by all. **Marie Sherd** who painted the market in 2009 arranged for the original, purchased by Dr Miller, to be on view in the museum for the market. A special presentation was made to Greg to mark his retirement. The booklet of the 'Object of the Month' outlines the full story. Cost is \$2.

Photo is of Marie's painting that was on display in the museum.



Mullumbimby's Vocal Minorities

Mullum's 'Wellness Industry' is now big business, growing hand in hand with a range of interconnected 'New Age' groups, inclusive of the 'Anti-Vaxxers' who have recruited a heap of new adherents lately and taken a more aggressive stance onto a wider mainstream stage. Ask Google about 'Mullumbimby Anti-Vaxxers' and you've got a lifetime's reading ahead of you, the article [How one hippie town became the anti-vaxxer capital of Australia \(smh.com.au\)](http://smh.com.au) summarising the relatively benign pre-covid picture. Covid paranoia has now escalated to the point where some shopkeepers have defied the imposition of more stringent infection controls in the wake of the virulent Delta variety by hanging out the shingle "No Mask, We Don't Ask", while others have to suffer customers uttering 'I've got an exemption' or declaring themselves above the law as 'Sovereign Citizens'. Paradoxically, some shops refuse entry to the vaccinated on the grounds that they risk infecting other customers by 'shedding the virus'. The anti-vax virus has also infected local politics, with one Mayoral candidate for Byron branded a danger to good shire governance because of his pro-vax stance, while fellow traveller Mandy Nolan, Greens candidate for Richmond, continues to suffer the wrath of the humourless. Community harmony is giving way to polarisation, and what for some was amused tolerance of minority beliefs is regressing into gross irritation bordering on fisticuffs. Others have crossed the divide as proselytising converts, leaving a confused remainder praying for the intervention of a believer in miracles.

There is a sense that the unfolding discord is heralding another shift in corporate culture, similar to the upheaval wrought by the arrival of the hippies, so much so that BVHS has been prompted to start archiving material for future historians to again ponder the question of what pre-existing conditions predisposed Mullum to attract so many people out of step with mainstream society. In the meantime is there anyone out there prepared to research and write a newsletter article on how it all came about? The above SMH article lays it at the feet of the Aquarians, but Mullum has always had its peculiarities and odd minority groups.

[Historical turning points in the town's evolution also occurred with the arrival of Her Majesty the Cow and dethroning by King Banana. The latter still has loyal subjects on the Tweed where each year a new King, generally a phallic monster over 12 inches long and reclining on a tasselled velvet cushion, is ceremoniously crowned during the rituals of the Banana Festival by a sane and sober VIP, including Deputy Prime Minister Doug Anthony in times past. He and most banana loyalists would consider the anti-vaxxers weird. Incidentally, upon opening the new Mullumbimby Seventh-day Adventist Church on 2Jul1961, Doug said its congregation *was the largest of the denomination between Newcastle and Brisbane...*, the coincidental census confirming Mullum had the highest concentration of Adventists in the Richmond-Tweed region (2.7% of the Municipality's 1,966 religious souls) and way above the NSW average of 0.3%. What was it about Mullum that made it so congenial to this vegetarian flock, apart from bananas?]

NEW EXHIBITION

Hats off to **Gale and Mark** for our new exhibition, **Hats & Headwear**, featuring a variety of hats/headwear that are in our collection; supplemented by some members' interesting pieces. Come in and check it out.

Photo is a portion of the display featuring ladies' hats. Men's and various Services are also displayed.



Brunswick Valley Historical Society Inc. Newsletter

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

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Newsletter: Members

WFD Supervisor:

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Public Officer: S. Tsicalas.

All members are invited to contribute to this newsletter

Please email contributions for the newsletter to

admin@mullumbimbymuseum.org.au

*Deadline for newsletter items
Tuesday 31st Aug 2021

NEXT MEETING

Tuesday 10th Aug 2021
@10.30am AGM

MUSEUM HOURS –
Tuesdays and Fridays

10.00-12.00

Market Saturdays 9.00 - 1.00

MULLUMBIMBY
COMMUNITY MARKET

Next Market- Saturday 21 Aug
mullumbimbycommunitymarket.com.au

