



NEWSLETTER
MAY 2011

Brunswick Valley Historical Society Inc. MUSEUM

Cnr Of Stuart & Myocum Streets MULLUMBIMBY 2482

OPEN: FRIDAY 11 AM - 3 PM

MARKET DAY (3RD SAT OF THE MONTH) 9 AM -12 PM

THE REAL WORLD

Mullum district development started to quickly overshadow that at Bruns with the start of the railway, the begetting of which generated wonderfully entertaining tales of breeches pocket politicians assisting *Sydney syndicates* to make a *motza on dummy-acquired lands* at the back of the Byron Bay swamps... and the improper dog-leg deviation to the Byron Bay sand patch..., which is all a "job and a swindle". In early Sep1891 the *Northern Star* announced that Alfred Allen MLA had paid an extraordinary £600 for **William House's** 50 acre selection adjoining the proposed railway station, 2mths before **William Grant Law** and his 20-man team won the Government contract to clear the jungle and find the place. (But the name on the deeds turned out to be Robert Palmer Allen, the brother-in-law of Thomas Ewing MLA, the surveyor who marked out an odd

looking plan for the 'Village of Brunswick' in 1880 and probably had a hand in initially delineating Mullumbimby). 'Allen' had a chunk of it subdivided into 264 lots by surveyor Joseph B. Kelly and by mid Jan1892 Murbah auctioneer/real estate agent R.C. Ewing had sold 75 to speculators for a nice return of £929/5/-, while leaving the legacy of Station Street as a private road, causing many hassles over the next 15yrs. (At the same time House and fellow speculator William Wardrop, storekeeper of Murbah, took the opportunity to create 60 house-sites on their separately subdivided allotments in the Government Village, which stopped at Stuart St., so named to probably immortalise Alexander Stuart, Premier 1883-85 who passed his Colonial Secretary's hat to William Dalley in 1884.)

On 30Oct91 at the other end of the embryo village, still all covered in scrub, **Donald McGougan** of Lismore opened the *Mullumbimby Hotel*, **Joseph Yates** was a month away from finishing the *School of Arts* nearby, and **Hugh McDermid Livingstone** of Bexhill was in the process of erecting his store and residence on the corner of Tincogan and Gordon Streets, next to McGougan and opposite the *School of Arts*. Prior to these events **Matthew Chisler** had attempted to stake a claim to Mullum's first commercial structure when, in Oct1889, A *conditional publican's license was applied for at last Licensing Court, Murwillumbah, by Mr M. Chisler, for a house at Mullumbimby. The court was adjourned till Friday just in order to get information as to the necessity for an hotel in that place, but presumably found there was none at this time. (And there's a free beer at McGougan's pub for anyone who can identify 'Gordon', another exception to Mullum's indigenous streetscape.)*

[The opening of the *School of Arts* at the end of the year was said to have 'inaugurated Mullumbimby', by which time the first cottages had also appeared, and thereafter references to 'Mullumbimby' gradually began to imply the new village rather than the 'Molebunbie' settlement. The Moleites surrendered the school in 1892 (but not without a fight if they were the blokes referred to by the *Tweed and Brunswick Advocate*: Owing to



Donald McGougan's "Mullumbimby Hotel"

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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 Tue Wed 10 am - 2 pm.

Or email to:

bvhs@tridentcommunications.com.au

NEXT MEETING

**Friday 20 TH MAY 2011
12.30pm. See you there!**

*Deadline for agenda items

Thursday 19th MAY 2011.

MUSEUM HOURS

Friday 11am - 3pm

Market Saturday 9 am - 12pm

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the interference of a number of crusty old bachelors and childless widowers, Mr W.J. Gillies, contractor for the erection of the Public school at Mullumbimby, has been instructed to suspend operations. The action of these obstructionists is worthy of most severe condemnation...), but didn't hand over the post office until 1896. Their last major business, Reddacliff Jnr's Blacksmithery, moved into town in 1898, at which time Reddacliff Snr joined the Mullum Prog Assoc and had a huge falling-out with neighbour John Macgregor. (Their other notable enterprise, Thomas Torrens' butchery, was sold in 1901 when he relocated to the village, although it's unclear whether the business was in fact already in Mullum by this time. But, adding to his growing share of the monopoly board, he bought the butchery back in 1903, at which time it was definitely in Burringbar St. The town's slaughter yards however, remained at his Molebunbie property.)]

Bruns had been thrown a bone and finally got a wharf in Aug91, and on Anniversary Day 1892 celebrated the opening of its *School of Arts* after a long fund raising effort by **Stan Francis**, the settlement's major social organiser over the past few years. *The entertainment was given by the Black Diamond Minstrels from the Tweed River. The first part of the performance.... comic dialogues peculiar to the negro fraternity.... The second part of the programme was a plantation scene - the troupe in full nigger costume.... There was a large gathering of the general public, over 150 being present... The hall was then cleared for the ball, and dancing was sustained till daylight..., males outnumbering females 3 to 1, the Misses Mills, Nixon, Chisler, Hains and Crabbe in great demand. In a diplomatic gesture, **Joseph Bede Kelly** of Byron Bay/Tyagarah was the major donor of books to form the new library. (Trustees for the 'School of Arts Reserve', Messrs **H.French, D. Hains, J.***

Macgregor, P. Nelson and J.G. Lund, had been appointed in Mar90.)

But they lost postmaster Francis to Trundle in May1892, a last-minute send-off party at the *Ocean View Hotel* chaired by **John McGregor** of Myocum and organised by **H.L. Thompson**, school teacher of Mullum, and **T.G. Hough**, farmer of Billinudgel, said the *Northern Star's* 'Brunswick Correspondent,' who reported a dignified affair and a good and representative attendance, but given a different slant by letter writer 'J.M.' to the *Tweed and Brunswick Advocate*, who said the party was arranged by 'Charlie and Tom', and ...*I regret to say that at 11 o'clock, when all the toasts, &c., were over, the revellers had the bad taste to rouse up all the young ladies in the township... It's a great pity that the original programme was not carried out, for instead of twelve being present there would have been double that number....*

Spirits had lifted because of hundreds of mouths to be fed with the advent of the railway, described by a SMH reporter in late 1891: *The most important work going on in the Richmond just now is, of course, the construction of the Lismore to Tweed railway.... I am prepared for great things. Having travelled 30 miles by coach from Lismore, through the heart of the "big scrub," and over rough roads a foot deep in mud, a dreary flat suddenly opened to view, and the sea, in a circling bay, could be seen in the distance. An hotel, two or three stores were visible. This was Byron Bay. It may in years to come be a great port. At present it consists of sandbanks and partly of a dismal swamp. As a township its only existence is up on paper. ...It is really an open roadstead, and the easterly gales are apt to play havoc with the shipping - that is when there is any shipping to play havoc with. The erection of the proposed breakwater will, however, alter*

the state of things. But this is not to be proceeded with just yet....

The route has been cleared of bush for the whole of the section, and already some 400,000 cubic yards of earth have been removed. The men are at work at different points along the contract, in all some 700 being employed.... Work on the first section is to be completed by the end of September, 1892, and it is now considered to be well ahead. Byron Bay is about the centre of the second section..., where about 500 men engaged.... Byron Bay boasts of the largest number of camp followers, and a good deal of business appears to be going on....

Whilst the Brunswickers thought their village was looking up, an outsider looking in saw a different picture. In Jun92 a group of travellers started the next phase of their tour: ...About half-past 10 we say farewell to Lismore, leaving by Jarvis and Son's coach.... About 7 o'clock a sandy track finishes our day's journey, and we wheel into Brunswick, a primitive and out-of-the-world place, 33 miles from Lismore. I retire to bed soon, but hear blackfellows wrangling in high voices during the night in the hotel yard.... I find Brunswick to consist of about half a dozen wooden houses on a sandy flat,

protected from the beach by the usual coastal scrub.... The river is lined with mangrove, where black swans are following its course on high, seaward....

At the same time **Peter Nelson** and his delegation returned from Sydney with news from the Minister for Works who said the Government had determined to expend £300,000 in building a railway to a point within five miles of the river's mouth. The Government could not afford to make a harbour to every river in the colony. Full inquiry should be made into the merits of the case, but he certainly did not feel inclined to spend anything like the sum said to be necessary for this work. If it were found practicable to carry a rough breakwater from the headland to the Halfside Rock for £4000 to £5000, he would be willing to sanction the construction of the work. (At this time too The wave of depression... passing over the colony and destitution in the cities was starting to receive more local press.)

Towards the end of Jun92 the great goings-on with the railway brought a reporter from the *Town and Country Journal* to have a sniff around. Approaching Bruns from the Tweed he saw ...All along the road the land, where at all valuable, has been taken up at various periods, but 9 selections

out of every 10 have been abandoned by the struggling pioneers. ...A few years ago quite a rush of industrious people took place to the north, and without ever considering how they were going to fare in the future, secured large blocks of this country. ...They laboured hard to effect the required improvements and to comply with the necessary regulations, by getting short spells of employment from the other wealthy selectors, or obtaining work from the Government upon the roads to help them along. This course generally turned out to be too severe a struggle for them, and a large percentage were eventually compelled, in the ordinary course of events, to mortgage their holdings. As soon as their term had expired the houses were abandoned, but the interest due to financial institutions had to be met, or else forfeiture of the sole control and power of the interested capitalist ensued....

The upshot of the whole business is that the great majority of the selected areas have been abandoned for years at a stretch until the fences and improvements are completely fallen into decay; while the small portions of land that were cleared have become clothed with thick undergrowth and noxious shrubs to such an extent that the cost to prepare the soil for agricultural purposes would be as great almost as on the day that the pioneer struck his axe into the first tree....

Travelling along the road in the direction of the Brunswick River it is pitiable to look upon these deserted homes where there is every local element to produce happiness and prosperity... Here and there can be found a selector struggling along by the aid of road work, which is the only method by which he can exist on his property and keep possession of it in the state that is required by the Land Act when his term expires by the effluxion of time. It does indeed seem deplorable that while numbers



H. Livingstone's General Store Circa 1894

of unemployed clamour for work that so many thousands of acres of rich land, capable of producing dozens of varieties of crops, are left idle and utterly unproductive....

...there are very few people on the Brunswick River who live from farming. In fact, they could all be counted on the fingers of one hand, and these strugglers exist by the sale of maize to the navvies now engaged on the railway works between Byron Bay and Mullumbimby. ...There is a small township at the Heads on the southern side, which rejoices in bearing the distinction of being larger in population than Mullumbimby.... These settlements are mainly supported by the timber trade.... If the road from the Heads towards the head of the river be followed it will be seen that all the selections met with have been deserted, and the land, which had been cleared, is now grown over.... A little above Mullumbimby a few persons are growing maize, and cane is now being experimented with....

...Frequently the outcome is that the whole property can be purchased for what it has actually cost the holder, without any consideration to the increase in the value of land by the approaching advent of the railway. The cases are numerous where ruination stares men in the face, and they threw up the sponge in disgust....

The contractors are pushing along the construction of the line from the bay to the Mullumbimby as rapidly as the wet weather will allow. The site of the station is now a dense scrub, but this is relieved by a small patch of land being cleared where Mullumbimby is being built. The village, although it now contains half a dozen houses, must yet become an important place.... It is needless to say that the roads throughout the district are in a deplorable state. ...the traffic caused by timbergetter's teams and carters employed on the railway works, have jointly

worked them into a series of dangerous bog holes....

Then it looked like the Government was going to waltz on the Mullum-Murbah portion of the line as the Depression emptied treasury coffers, and in Aug92 it was reported Several hundreds of people are without employment, and some are destitute, between here and the Tweed, awaiting acceptance of tender... Some have large families, and their condition is pitiable.... In Sep92 A great number of men, women, and children are camped on the last section of the Tweed Railway, between Mullumbimby and Murwillumbah, anxiously waiting work. Numbers continue to arrive from all parts of Queensland.... In Oct92: The district is suffering from the depression which appears to be nearly universal. Public meetings were held everywhere and finally the Government relented, the Minister for Works arriving at Murbah in Dec92 to turn the first sod for the last section of the line.

The railway certainly brought temporary relief. By early Dec92 **Joseph Yates** had opened the *Railway Hotel* in Station Street and there were 10 stores and ~5 pubs ...between the Bridge at the Pocket (Billinudgel) to the end section at Brunswick River. To feed the multitudes the farmers, particularly Messrs **Williams, Cameron, Dawson and Livingstone** of Myocum are ploughing, ...a good augury of a new era for the Brunswick, while **Peter Nelson** was up at Murbah again bashing the ear of the Minister for Works about the river entrance. Six months later boats bringing materials for the railway started to offload at Mullum and return with a backload of pine, bypassing the new wharf at Bruns. But in 1893 the Depression tightened its grip and it was *déjà vu* all over again.

By Peter Tsicalas

COMMITTEE NEWS

We were delighted that the April market was very well attended & profitable to all after the previous 3 markets were either rained out or rained on affecting takings for us and the stall holders.

John Lewis has been beavering away repairing and preparing a display which will be presented to the public at the next market on Saturday 21st May. What has he been working on - a dissolvenator! A what? Come and find out.

NEW ACQUISITIONS

Mallams 5 Star Supermarket acquired in the late 1960s a Burroughs Accounting Machine which Keith Chittick, their office employee used to compile the accounts of their customers. On the closing of the business in Mullumbimby, Chris Mallam donated the machine to the museum. Keith visited and told us how the machine was used.

VOLUNTEER

COORDINATOR'S UPDATE

Thanks to all the volunteers who came last Friday to assess the needs of the Shed. The future looks brighter for the Museum with so much new input, and more willing helpers.

Also welcome to Bernie who is assisting Robbie with 'Oral Histories' and helping to preserve the many stories about 'days of old'.

With everyone there on Friday the museum was buzzing and we look forward to many more Fridays like this.

Anyone wishing to help is welcome to join us.

Don't forget about our great '**Olde-fashioned Picnic**' on Monday the 13th June. We'll all setup our own picnic sites on the lush green lawns of the Museum ground, and after eating, there'll be races and competitions, like we had in the 'good old days' like sack races, egg 'n' spoon, three-legged dashes, and wheelbarrow marathons. Don't miss out! More information to come, and if you'd like to be part of the organisation, or have some ideas, please contact me.