

Newsletter

September/October 2022

Have you noticed lately on the news, the number of people expressing wonder about towns being established along river banks and flood plains? Do you think they realise that in 1788, British people arrived in a country of only narrow tracks and occasional clearings. They arrived in ships and once here, that was the only way to move from one place to another unless they were keen on a long walk! It was many years before there were tracks wide enough for a vehicle. Waterways were the highways in this country.

NOTES FROM THE MUSEUM

Roberts Family



There is a new family story in the area set aside for Pioneers of Ballina and District. 'Little is known about William Roberts' time as a convict, but we do know that for a time, he was assigned to a gang working on Bruny Island, Tasmania – probably felling timber.'

In 1844, he married Agnes McMillan, who had arrived in the convict ship, 'Westmoreland', in 1836. They had six children, spent time in the Huon Valley and in Ballarat in the Victorian goldfields, then made their way north, eventually arriving in Ballina. William soon found work as a cedar cutter in Tintenbar.

William died in 1879 and is believed to be buried in the Pioneer Cemetery in Ballina. The rest of the family story can be found at the museum in a folder near the display.

Ref. Roberts' Family Story

The Leasons of Pimlico:

Arriving on the Richmond River in the 19th century, the Leeson family settled in both Pimlico and across the river near Wardell where they joined the cane farming community. When the need for a community gathering place was first identified, it was Christopher Leeson who offered the use of his large barn which was located on his farm on the riverbank. Many celebrations and meetings were held there including Christmas celebrations, concerts, and dances. When the community investigated a site for a new larger hall, it was again Chris who gave a section of his farm, on higher ground, for the erection of a hall.

Three of the Leasons were actually involved in the construction, along with several other farmers in the immediate area.

Great grandson of Christopher, Craig Leeson, (at right) with his wife, visited the museum recently and he was absolutely delighted to see the old hall blossoming as a museum now. He was also welcomed as a new member of the Society.

Ref, 'History of Pimlico Hall.'



HEALTH REPORT

Each day for the last two and a half years, we have woken to hear the latest news about Covid 19 and its variants. Across the world, medical practitioners have worked assiduously to develop vaccines and bring us, via radio, TV and social media, the latest information and areas of support. Our hospital accommodation has been strained as have the personnel to support the ill.

In the early days of European settlement in the Richmond Valley, there was no formal health support. Fortunately, in any group of people, there will be those who have some medical knowledge gained through personal experience and, sometimes, some training. Certainly, there would have been midwives to assist with the births but no extra help for difficult situations. Sadly, a walk through the Pioneer cemetery in Ballina or any of the cemeteries in Alstonville, Wardell or Rous, reveals those who died when they were very young.

In Cliff Murray's book, 'Across Three Bridges' (ATB) he has recorded the first efforts by Ballina Council to attend to health matters, other than street drainage. I quote, 'On October 10th 1892, it (*the council*) approached health authorities with a request for Dr. Remie to be appointed health officer for the port, and also Government Medical Officer and vaccinator for Ballina Police District.' Dr Remie's appointment in August 1884 can be considered Council's first involvement in health.

Researcher Lyn has been seeking information about the early history of hospitals here in Ballina. The earliest record found was an article from the Northern Star on June 9th 1894, announcing the completion of the first Public Hospital for Ballina, which had been erected in Cherry Street.



This photo was taken in the early 1930s

In total, the hospital boasted a wide hall running through the building with a female ward, a male ward, warden's quarters, a kitchen attached to the building, a long verandah with toilets and bathroom, a laundry and a dispensary. There was also a separate mortuary.

Disease, some of which was brought by rats on ships coming into the port, became more widespread and by the early 1990s diphtheria, scarlet fever and typhoid spread throughout the district. There was a serious problem with drainage which could not cope with swamp conditions in and near the town centre. After receiving a report from Dr Corlis of Alstonville in February 1904, the Mayor, Ald. Webster, requested and gained a supply of disinfectant to be distributed amongst the population. (from p332 ATB.)

The census of 1901 showed a population in Ballina of 1,819 and 324 dwellings, 304 of which were of wood and 209 which had five or more rooms. The water supply was abundant and good. The problem with drainage continued, however, and in 1909 the open drain in Moon Street was replaced by pipes. There was no sewerage.

THE NEXT STEP

The Northern Star of September 17th, 1936, reported that a special meeting of the Board of the Ballina District Hospital agreed to proceed with the building of a new hospital. A grant of 5,000 pounds from the Hospitals Commission was accepted by Council with additional funds from the Schrader Estate and a loan of 4,000 pounds to be repaid over 20 years.

A tender by John Schmitzer of Casino for the hospital renovations, erection of new building with sewerage and septic tank was accepted the Department of Public Works and Local Government. It was agreed at 14,777 pounds. During construction there were minor additions and modifications so that the final cost was 20,000 pounds.

Northern Star Wednesday 11th January, 1939:

'While minor finishing touches have to be completed, patients have been moved into the new wards and all sections of the hospital are open to the community. The facilities compare with a hospital of similar size in Sydney, and Ballina will be serviced well. There are 4 Private rooms, 4 Intermediate wards that each hold 4 beds, while Public wards accommodate 6. There is a maternity ward and an operating theatre.'



MURRAY VIEWS NO. 36. DISTRICT HOSPITAL, BALLINA, N.S.W.

Those born in Ballina before 1939 would have been born in the old Public Hospital or one of several private facilities. Some would have been delivered at home by a midwife.

This photo of the hospital was probably taken in the late forties and used as a souvenir for sale by the Murray studios which produced many such photos throughout Australia.

PRIVATE HOSPITALS

Although there is no private hospital in Ballina at present there are several clinics where surgery is performed. However, in the early years of the 20th century there were several private hospitals in Ballina and in the other growing towns of the area. Although no photographs have been found, there are several newspaper articles and advertisements which provide us with information.

OWASSA

Richmond River Express and Casino Kyogle Advertiser 1904 to 1929

Friday 10th May, 1907

“Owassa” Private Hospital, under management of Dr Margaret A Corlis M.D. C.M. for Lying-in, Surgical, General Cases other than Infectious’

Owassa was located in River Street and may have been the first private hospital in Ballina.

CLAREMONT

Northern Star (1876 - 1964)

Saturday, 1 September, 1923

‘Public Notice

“Owassa” Private Hospital has removed to the premises in Swift Street recently occupied by Matron Jamieson and will in future be known as Claremont Private Hospital.

M. Kerby, Matron.’

The Claremont Private Hospital was a grand timber building in Swift Street and certainly remained in use as a hospital throughout the forties and fifties. The building, however, was originally a shop owned by Ferzes and, after closing as a hospital, became Claremont Flats.

ST. ROCHE’S

The Northern Star of July 13, 1916 carried an advertisement for St Roche’s Private Hospital in Norton Street. Matron W L Kirkpatrick A.T.N.A. announced that she had taken over this favourite Hospital, and would seek to continue with the same satisfactory lines as her predecessor, Matron Fitzhenry. Medical, surgical and maternity services could be provided in private homes in town and district.

On Tuesday 16 January, 1917 St Roche’s Hospital advertised thus: ‘Close to surf, for medical, surgical and midwifery cases. Patients also treated for rheumatism and nervous diseases by massage, medication and vapour baths. Spinal douches and electricity as prescribed by physician in charge.’ The Matron was Nurse Turner ATNA.

By May 1917, the Northern Star noted that Mrs Ford had taken over St Roche’s Hospital adding that ‘She has excellent credentials having nursed patients in Sydney after the plague of 1900, also being a member of the Vigilance Committee of Sydney to help stamp out the epidemic.’ Her experience in this area extended to the Malay Straits and China.

Editor’s note: Lyn has found no record of exactly when St.Roche’s became a hospital but family records show that William Gould was born there in 1914. The building was still in Norton Street at least until the 1950’s but was no longer a hospital. I recall that it fascinated us as it had an attic which was not common in Ballina at that time.

Other private hospitals are mentioned in various newspaper articles in various local editions but there is little information about them. If any of our readers have more detail about any of them, it would be great to hear from you.

Here is what Lyn found:

Dalhousie Private Hospital, Swift Street; c. 1910 Matron Taylor, c.1913 Miss Clifford.

Gowan Brae, Swift Street.

The Ranch, Cherry Street, c.1924 Matron Jamieson (wife of Lawrence Jamieson) - *who had been in Swift Street before Claremont Hospital was moved into the premises she had occupied in 1923. Ed.*

DOCTORS

In a number of documents doctors are mentioned but there is little information about them. We do know, however, that Dr Vincent Yates was a popular General Practitioner in Ballina in the 1930's and 40's. His practice was in a lovely house on the corner of Cherry Street and Fawcett Lane.....now a carpark. He also performed surgery at Ballina Public Hospital.



Dr Yates's House and Surgery

LAST WORDS - MONARCHS

We have been informed by the media of our (yes, us here in Australia) change of monarch, with much grief for Elizabeth II and celebration for Charles III. The news readers insist that "most of us" have had only one monarch in our lifetimes. If you are not part of "the most", and that is probably millions of loyal subjects across the world, we have had at least two. Here is a summary of what is possible.

Edward VII - 22/01/1901 to 06/05/1910,

George V - 1910 to 21/01/1936,

Edward VIII 21/01/1936 to 11/12/1936 (abdicated),

George VI - 11/12/1936 to 1952,

Elizabeth II - 06/02/1952 to 08/09/2022 and

Charles III 08/09/2022 - ?.

Have you worked out how many monarchs have reigned over you?

Once again, a very big thank you to Lyn Pramana, who not only finds material but types it from the almost unreadable newspaper articles that she knows I cannot see. Thank you also to the rest of the team - Diana, Angela and Peter for proof-reading.

Patricia Wilson
Editor