

BALLINA & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC

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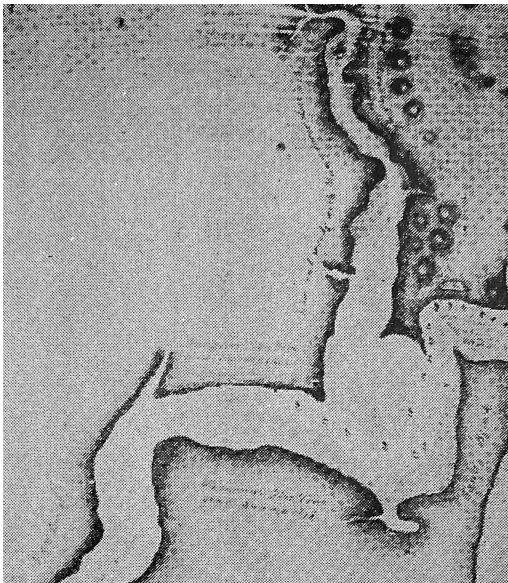
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Good News

The recent floods and storms have impacted the lives of thousands of people across the Northern Rivers and left many feeling tired and frustrated.... some now homeless. There are, however, always some good news stories and we have one of our own. Miraculously, our museum is above flood level - yes, even this one - and the only damage is from the continuing dampness of the ground. The small group of volunteers, who have worked tirelessly for two years through pandemics and flood, are the only reason we have a place to showcase our local history. They are to be heartily congratulated.

Having viewed the photos of flooding printed in the last issue, we will now look back to the early 19th century.

THE ESTUARY



It is interesting to speculate on the exact nature of the estuary of the river when Captain Henry Rous sailed into the mouth, in 1828, and gave it the name, Richmond. He travelled some 20 miles upstream and could see that it was navigable for at least that distance. Doubtless he recognised the quality of the timber and general nature of the land. (Ref. Across Three Bridges, Cliff Murray)

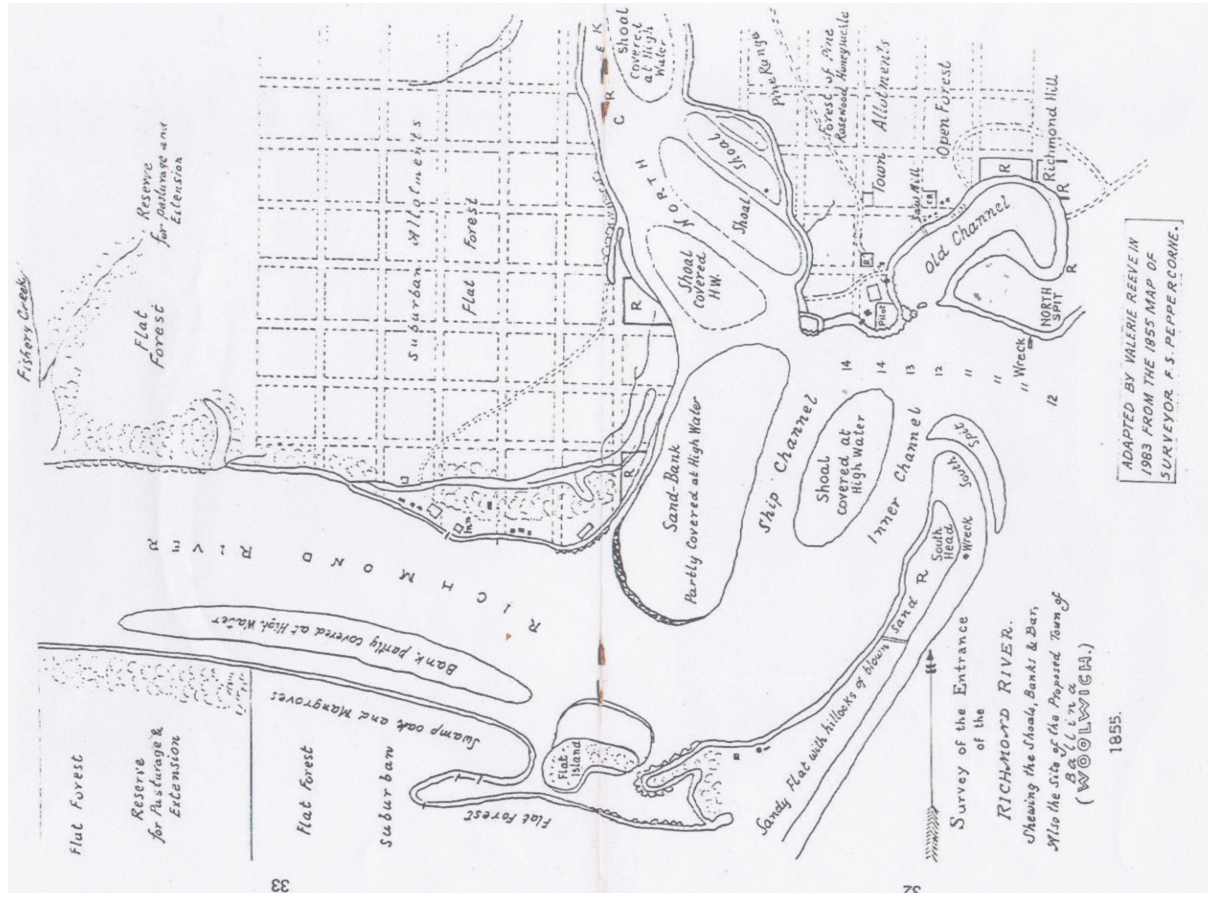
At left is a cropped version of Rous's map which shows the entrance circling around a small peninsula on the north side of the river and a large body of water flowing into the river from the north (later named North Creek). The map also shows the entrance to another creek to the west which is now called Emigrant Creek.

It is easy to see that the actual channel is different from the one we see today. It flowed into the Pacific

Ocean at the southern edge of Lighthouse Hill. You can imagine mangrove lined banks, and many trees and bushes which are still evident in reserves which the council has wisely retained over the many years of development.

The 1842 settlers who arrived on the first ships, settled on the peninsula where the Pioneer cemetery is today, and spread along the banks of North Creek which was, and still is, relatively high ground. The small bay to the east was called 'New Chums Bay'. Jas (James) Ainsworth, one of the settler's children, arrived with his family in 1847. His memories of early days, which were later dictated to Thos Russell, were collected in a small book which was republished in 1987. A copy is held in our Museum collection.

I quote from the book, 'My earliest recollection of West Ballina naturally envisages a picture the very opposite of today. Then it was for the most part a huge lightly timbered flat with ribs or ridges of heavy box and gum trees. There were also patches of thick brush, with large areas of ti-tree swamp choked with cutting grass and carrying water all the year round'. The name of this area described by James, became the town of Ballina.



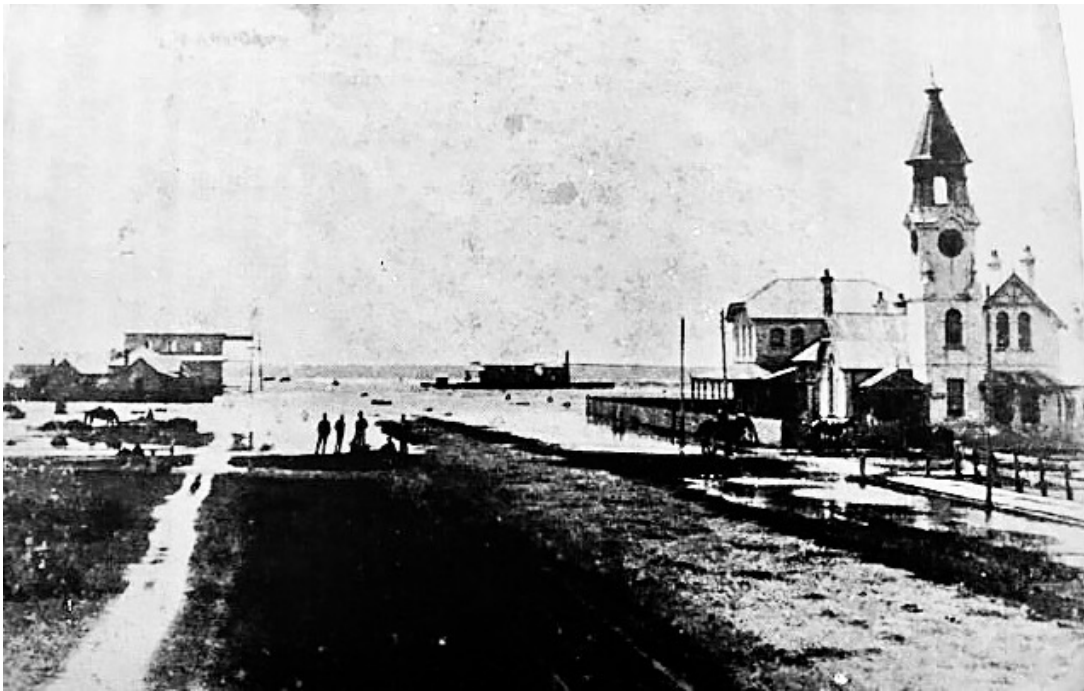
Editor's note: I have oriented this map with north at the top. This survey map of the entrance of the Richmond River was drawn in 1855 by F S Peppercorn. His original map was adapted by Valerie Reeve in 1983.

From James Ainsworth's description and my childhood recollections from the 1940's, I can see why Ballina is inclined to have a little water in the streets at high tide.

A LITTLE MORE GEOGRAPHY

If you go into your favourite browser and type 'Map of Ballina's creeks and river', it should show you an excellent coloured map of our area. You may discover more than I did, but it seems that North Creek drains the Newrybar Swamp and Emigrant Creek low-lying areas to the west of the old Pacific Highway. As the waters proceed towards the Richmond River, they gather Maguires Creek (which flows into Emigrant Creek) and many smaller tributaries. Fishery Creek, which is noted on the 1855 map, connects with the canal between the old railway bridge and the Scout Hall on Canal Road.

Still within Ballina Shire, we have Duck Creek coming down from the Alstonville plateau and at least three other small waterways coming in from the South Ballina peninsula. In conclusion, we live on a magnificent river which, when it is clean again, will soon restock with fish and other marine life.



I apologise for the poor quality of this photo but it is clear enough to see the old Post Office, under clear skies, with a very high tide in 1892

When there are king tides, it is still common to see water flowing from the drains in Tamar and Grant Streets as well as low areas in other streets.

Levels of rainfall in the Northern Rivers are known to be the highest in New South Wales with Mullumbimby, Dunoon Modanville and Nimbin having an annual average mean rainfall of 2330mm. Ballina has an av. mean rainfall of 1580mm. (Ref Bonzle Digital Atlas)

Ballina Shire Council has spent several years investigating and planning Flood Plain Management. The areas of concern are identified as Richmond River Flooding, Creek Flooding from Emigrant Creek, Maquires Creek and North Creek, Ocean Storm Surge Flooding, Overland Flooding and Results of Climate Change. A report was presented to the public for comment between December 2021 and February 2022 and this is still available on the Council website.

FROM THE MUSEUM

On April 26th we had a visit from fifteen members of the Rotary Satellite Club of Ballina Lifestyle who expressed genuine interest and amazement at the quality of the museum collection. As requested by the group, Ann Mulder gave a short presentation on the first settlers in Ballina and information about the museum itself. This was very well received by the visitors, many of whom commented positively on her knowledge and clear explanations. It was a very happy morning with promises of a return visit.

FOCUS EXHIBITION

The new display about the sugar industry in Ballina is well underway and, given no more interruptions, will be open when you receive this newsletter. To whet your appetite, I will provide a little historic information.

Who was the first?

From information provided in several accounts on this topic, it can be concluded safely, that both William Clement and his neighbour John Sharpe, were the first to grow sugar cane in Ballina, and the first to have one (or two) sugar mills.

The following information was found by our research expert Lyn Pramana. The direct quotes are marked and are in italics. Draw your own conclusions.

1. The biography of William Clement that is found in WikiTree, states that:

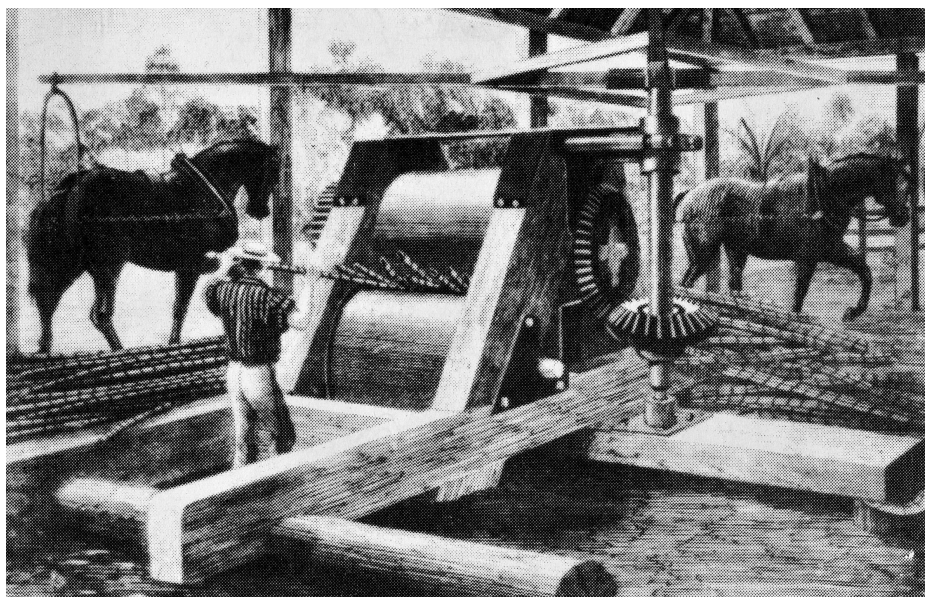
William Clement, a carpenter by trade, built a house in Tonki and a residence for the founder of Lismore, William Wilson. During the growth of Ballina in the mid 1850s, *'he, with his partner Fred Bacon, built many of the homes and public buildings in Ballina, including the first Public School and the Sawyers Arms Hotel'*.

'William was one of first selectors at North Creek, and in 1864/1866, had acquired property south of Prospect on North Creek, where he became one of the first cane growers. He constructed and owned the first built sugar mill in Ballina, the Alpha Sugar Mill, which was horse powered and had wooden rollers.'

The name, Alpha, meaning one or first, gives support to the claim.

2. James Ainsworth recalls in his Reminiscences p.10 that *'About 1865 the late John Sharpe, senr. came north from Kiama and selected the Prospect estate - adjoining Mr Clement's holding - and upon this land in the following year erected the first sugar mill on the Richmond River.'*

3. Further similar statements naming Mr John Sharpe as the owner of the first sugar mill can be found in his obituary in the Northern Star of Tuesday 12th February 1927 and in 'Across Three Bridges' by Cliff Murray.



This photo, left, shows a horse powered mill, which is not necessarily the one owned by either man. A large photo of the mill, with information and artefacts relating to the sugar industry, are currently displayed in the museum along with an extensive selection of photos taken over more than 160 years.

The photo below shows the remnants of the sugar mill owned by John Sharp. It is located on the western end of the Ballina Golf Course and can be reached easily from the western end of Eyles Drive. The large clump of bamboo in the photo can be seen from the road, and becomes a useful guide.



As the cane industry grew, many small mills were constructed in Ballina, Alstonville and surrounding areas and were closed when the Colonial Sugar Refining Company built the mill at Broadwater to cater for all cane crops being grown in the Richmond Valley.

PIONEER FAMILIES

There is a space in the Museum where photographs and information can be displayed by descendants of the earliest pioneers. It would be ideal to see this space taken up by a series of displays, changing every two or three months. If you are interested, please contact the editor by email. You would be assisted with the actual display if you can provide the relevant information.

Please note.

This is a newsletter, not a historical document. To support my own writing, I have included quotes from published books and other papers about history and provided the names of source material. I will continue to do this. My aim, however, is to provide enough information to arouse your interest in Ballina and its history. I am grateful to Lyn Pramana for her research and Elvin Andrews for his assistance with historical data.

Patricia Wilson.
Editor