



BALLINA & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC

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As I sit here in my warm study on this very cold, damp July day, my mind is drawn to our early white settlers. Certainly, they had mainly come from the British Isles where the winter days are much colder than here and are accompanied by cloudy skies which drip constantly. They would see this weather as comparatively mild. There were, however, no warm comfortable houses and their shelter was often hand made and hard won. They were brave, stoic and looking to a bright future in this wonderful land. We are here only because of their fortitude.

FROM THE MUSEUM

Last month a couple came by who were very interested in the Focus exhibition on the sugar industry. It was fortuitous they had come as the wife was a descendant of none other than John Sharpe. At my request, her husband, Ian, has been sending me lots of information and photographs. This has enabled me to set up a Pioneer Family exhibition about the Sharpe family and that will certainly generate attention. I hope it leads other pioneer families to develop another display by September or October. After all, our history is all about people.



In the display, we have John Sharpe Snr, his wife, Margaret, John Sharpe Jnr and wife with two photos of family members. Ian has also provided information which is in a folder for you to read. The photo on the right shows the mill in production. After some time operating solely for sugar production, Sharpe extended the operation to mill some of the timber, being cut from the forests in the area. As the population of Ballina grew and homes were being constructed, the timber would have been in high demand.

THEN AND NOW

Having been in and around Ballina for most of my life I have seen many changes and I thought I would share some with you.

The Masonic Hall.

A brief history:

1. A meeting to form a Masonic Lodge in Ballina was held in March 1882 in the Mobb's Room at the Occidental Hotel, situated in what is now Fawcett Street.
2. In 1883, Mr J J Lewis constructed a two story building named The Masonic Hall, on the corner of Moon and River Streets. The Masonic Lodge rented the main room, or hall, on the second floor and used it for meetings and storage. A ball was held to celebrate the opening of the hall.
3. Members of the Lodge decided they needed to have premises of their own. In 1888 they purchased land in Cherry Street. In 1900, loans and guarantees by Lodge members allowed them to erect a single story building facing Cherry Street.
4. Between 1914 and 1918 the single story was raised and a lower floor constructed. This was an amazing feat as the building was over 60 tons and there would not have been any cranes.
5. Post-supported balconies were erected over Cherry Street footpath which gave the hall and impressive appearance. Lodge offices were all upstairs, and downstairs was a large hall with a stage, supper room and dressing rooms.

Until 1915, when the Centennial Hall was built, it was the largest hall in Ballina and most big social events were held there. There were school concerts, debutant balls, fancy dress balls and many community concerts and displays.

In 1987, having been damaged by cars, the balcony was removed. Further problems were discovered including deterioration of the roof. A decision was made to demolish the building. After some debate, the new centre was erected with the Foundation Stone being laid on April 17th 1990.



Masonic Hall before the balconies were added.



These new premises (left), as they stand in 2022 are still used extensively by the Lodge and the community. As well as providing a small but substantial room for displays and meetings, there is a commercial kitchen from which hot meals are provided to people in need.

Reference: 'Meeting Place and the Temple' with articles from local newspapers.

The Centennial Hall

On Monday March 8 1915, the Northern Star (Lismore) reported that a new hall would be opened on March 10 by 'Ald. Thomas Russell (due to the absence of the Mayor)

I quote from the report: 'After the opening ceremony, a really high class concert and variety entertainment will be held. The Centennial Hall, the property of Mr Thomas Clegg, is one of the finest on the North Coast and has been especially designed by Mr Clegg to suit the requirements of the town and district. The whole of the work has been carried out splendidly, and seating accommodation has been provided for 1000 people, while the stage is large enough to run a motor car on.'



A number of events were held in the next four or five years to raise funds for the War Effort (WWI). On Monday March 2nd 1919, a Patriotic Picture Show was held in the hall. Several up-to-date films were screened with the Overture and Prompt being played by the Centennial Orchestra. * *More information on page 4* It is interesting to note that the Commissioner for Taxation agreed to delete the amusement tax which then allowed for the following prices:
Body of hall - 1/- Dress Circle - 1/6
Photo from Ballina Library

Concerts continued to be held and more movies became available as the industry grew. Sadly, this wonderful old hall burnt down in 1938. The owner at the time, was Ted Henderson of Lennox Head, and he, with his two daughters Agatha and Laura, moved quickly to build the Plaza Theatre on the same site.

The new cinema was purpose built and became the centre for movie goers in Ballina each night and Saturday afternoons. Those of you who lived in Ballina in the 40s, 50s and 60s would surely have attended many sessions. It was quite different from today's experience. The program began with Newsreels, a serial such as Tarzan, cartoons and sometimes a short movie. After interval, which was when you went to the Milk Bar for ice creams and Jaffas, the main feature was shown.



The Centennial Orchestra

Referring back to a mention of the above named ensemble, I have noticed that we have a photo at the museum and I have inserted it below. It was noted in a newspaper article in 1921 that Ballina was the smallest town in Australia to have such an orchestra and you can see from this photograph that they were a very professional looking group.

Photograph taken 1911-1912



Back Row Left to Right: Walter Gray, Alex Eyles, Billy Jarrett, Charles McBurne
Middle Row Left to Right: A.J.McMullen, Carl Elliott, Jos Deegan, Jack Fitzhenry,
Arthur Smith, Dr. Sanderson
Front Row Left to Right; Miss Laura Henderson, Theo Ducrov, A Carson, Harry Jarratt,
Miss Ethel Jarratt who was the pianist.

Ref. Photograph and names from the Richmond River Historical Society

It is clear that it did not take very long for entertainment to become an important part of life in Ballina and that cultural activities were varied and widespread. Researcher Lyn Pramana has been successful in finding the information I have used and she has many more snippets in store for the next newsletters.

We are keen to hear about stories that have been handed down through families, especially if there are photographs as well. If you would like to share them with the wider community, your donation will be recognised.

Many thanks for assistance from Lyn, Elvin, Ann and Diana

Patricia Wilson - Editor