

The discovery and Growth of Greater Wollongong (by W. H. Mitchell)

(continued from September Bulletin)

Now, in 1954, the total distance travelled by buses in this City is approximately 2,500,000 miles per annum, with quarter hourly services to Austinmer.

The railway line from Wollongong to Scarborough was constructed in 1887 and was later extended to Kiama. In 1888 the link between Scarborough and Waterfall was made, thus completing the connection between Wollongong and Sydney.

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In 1954, approximately 50,000 motor vehicles pass the intersection of Crown and Keira Streets each day. Air services direct from other States to Albion Park were instituted in 1954.

WOLLONGONG HARBOUR

In the early days of Illawarra, the Wollongong Harbour was used for cedar shipping. In the latter part of the century it was used extensively for the shipment of coal. By 1830 the need for a larger harbour was becoming evident and between 1838 and 1846 a convict gang was employed doing the excavation work. Further improvements were completed in 1868 which consisted of the deepening of the harbour and construction of the inner basin.

The improved harbour was opened by the governor, the Earl of Belmore; hence the name "Belmore Basin". The harbour was later superseded by Port Kembla Harbour and is now used only by fishing boats. The old lighthouse, lit by acetylene gas, was erected and was completed in 1871. It had a range of 10 miles.

In 1937, the new lighthouse with a range of seventeen miles, was built. A fort was established at Signal Hill, near the harbour in 1879. Three twenty pounder guns were placed there and two more on Smith's Hill. The Smith's Hill guns were not dismantled till 1907.

The old Fort site, although unused for military purposes, was retained by the army, and in 1954 the army decided it was a suitable spot to build administrative buildings and establish a training ground for the local battalion. The City Council, however, had ideas of preserving this historic spot and eventually developing it as a tourist resort so a short argument ensued. As the time of writing this story, the matter appears to be well on the way to settlement as the Council has offered to the army, in exchange, an area of several acres on Beaten Park, Gwynneville.

Note: The army has now accepted the Beaten Park site.

Between Wollongong and Port Kembla lies an area known as Tom Thumb Lagoon. Historians tell us this is not the lagoon, where Bass and Flinders landed, and they are unable to account for the name.

For many years a scheme has been mooted to dredge this area and create an "Inner Harbour". The matter has been discussed by several Governments, but somewhere along the way a hitch regularly occurs. It has recently been brought forward in Parliament again and it seems certain that this new harbour will, eventually, be constructed, to the great benefit of industry and for the further advancement of the City. The port of an industrial centre is the great artery which keeps it alive and the existing harbour at Port Kembla is quite inadequate to deal with the shipping which would use it. Harbour records indicate that thousands of tons of shipping are held up for long periods. With the construction of the Inner Harbour will come still greater development for the City of Wollongong.

BATHS

The first unofficial swimming baths in Wollongong were holes in the rocks on the beach. Around the eighties, bathing was permitted only at night. Men and women had to bathe separately. A ladies swimming pool was constructed in 1859. In 1897 the local newspaper reported that a man had been seen watching the ladies bathe; he protestingly left when asked by an official to do so. The newspaper referred to him as a "blackguard" and condemned his conduct as "unmanly and despicable and deserving of severe punishment." Strict neck to ankle costumes were the rule in those days; had "Bikinis" been the vogue it would probably have been necessary to carry the "blackguard" away by force.

Surf bathing was commenced in 1908, when the first surf life saving club was formed. The continental baths were constructed in 1926.

Since 1908 surf bathing has developed from a minor sport, in which there were few active participants, into the most popular of all summer sports. The eighteen life-saving clubs which now patrol the city beaches perform a great public service in protecting the lives of surfers.

ART AND THE THEATRE

There was no organised form of the higher arts in the early days. The Keira Theatre, opened in 1861, provided entertainment in the form of concerts and old time dramas.

To-day we have such organisations as the Arts Council, the Eisteddfod Society, the Orchestral Society, the choral Society, the Society of Artists, the Work shop Theatre and others.

Interest in the higher arts, however, has been greatly retarded since the advent of the modern cinema theatre, and the introduction, through radio, of a poor type of American music and many "eccentric" (?) - they are deserving of a stronger adjective - singers. With the passing of almost one hundred years, some appreciation of the higher arts is developing very gradually.

SPORTING ACTIVITIES

The oldest sports in the city are undoubtedly cricket and football but there is nothing to indicate when, they were introduced. Cricket was first played in Australia in 1803.

Tennis was introduced to Illawarra in 1893 and has been subject to "ups and downs" in the degree of its popularity. Golf was started in 1898 and bowls in 1906. In that short period bowls has developed from a game played only by old men, into a young man's game and it is also played by women. Introduced more recently are; hockey, basketball, archery, baseball and polocrosse. Horse racing was introduced in 1835 and greyhound racing in the 1930's.

HOTELS

Various historical writings reveal the names of a number of inns which have existed in this city. The first "inn" is reported to have been at Spring Hill, but there is no record of its being a licensed inn. The first licensed inn was erected about 1830 on what is now McCabe Park. The proprietor was granted a free license as the Colonial Secretary expressed the opinion that his profits were uncertain. Possibly the Colonial Secretary had visions of the introduction of six o'clock closing.

A brewery was established in 1839 and the Sydney press reported that Wollongong was improving fast.

The first hospital was opened in 1864 in Flinders Street on land given by C. T. Smith. Mr. Smith appears to have been the local "Squire" and certainly the most important man in Wollongong in the early days.

The hospital was called "The Albert Memorial Hospital".

It had no bathroom but patients could request a bath if they so desired and secure one if water was available. The foundation stone for a new hospital was laid in 1906 on Garden Hill and provided for twelve male and six female patients. The hospital was added to later, the total cost being about £6000.

The hospital has brown until, to-day, the city has a modern hospital with up-to-date equipment and capable of carrying 333 patients. In its elevated position it rises high above the city and is a fine landmark.

Another hospital was erected on the lower mountain slopes at Bulli in 1892, it was enlarged in 1947 and is now a fine modern hospital capable of accommodating 62 patients.

An ambulance service was commenced in the 1920's.

It provided voluntary service and a hand litter, but shortly afterwards a horsedrawn vehicle was provided. The first motor ambulance was used in 1923. To-day the Illawarra District Ambulance, with headquarters at Wollongong, has two branches; one at Bulli and one at Kiama; and handles over 10,000 cases a year with great efficiency.

RAILWAYS

The extension of the railway line from Sydney to Illawarra presented many difficulties.

The railway from Sydney to Waterfall, commenced in 1893, was completed in 1896. Having climbed without much difficulty to the Waterfall plateau, the problem arose of how to reach the Illawarra district. Workable grades were essential; it was therefore quite impossible to follow the direct route along the mountain range, because of the 1000ft. drop to Illawarra.

A section from Scarborough to Wollongong was completed and opened in 1887., This was the Jubilee year of Queen Victoria's reign, and the bridge over the railway cutting near Wollongong Station was named Jubilee Bridge.

Passengers travelling by train from Wollongong to Sydney had to leave the train at Scarborough and take a coach to Waterfall, where they caught the Sydney train.

Ultimately a way was found to link the two sections of line by going down into the gorges of a number of creeks which descended into Port Hacking. By working from one to another, through tunnels, it finally gained the upper reaches of Port Hacking Creek. This stream rises about half a mile from the Coast to the west of Bald Hill, but is cut off from the sea by a 700ft, plateau isthmus.

It is these tunnels which now cause problems in any proposal to electrify the Illawarra line, and that is why the regional development Committee have advocated the electrification from Scarborough to Port Kembla.

The Unanderra-Moss Vale line was constructed in 1932 to serve as a direct link between the Port Kembla industrial area and the Southern Tablelands. It is steeply graded, rising 2000 feet in the first fifteen miles. The higher plateau top is reached at Robertson and the final connection with Moss Vale is over undulating country.

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(To Be Continued)