"The Illawarra Mercury"—Ninety Years of South Coast Journalism

The speaker at the monthly meeting on 6th June, 1946, at Brandon House was Mr. W. S. Musgrave, Managing-Editor, Illawarra Newspapers Pty. Ltd., who has kindly prepared the following digest of his address:

The "Illawarra Mercury" first saw the light of day on October 4, 1855. Its first home was in a building near Market Square. This building had once been an hotel and the dining room was turned into a meeting place.

The first proprietor was Mr. Tom Garrett, father of the famous Australian cricketer. His editor was Mr. John Curr. Mr. Garrett was the first mayor of Wollongong and Mr. Curr the first town clerk.

Mr. Garrett became the member for Shoalhaven in the Legislative Assembly.

Mr. William McCourt, who had begun as an apprentice, succeeded Mr. Garrett as the "Mercury's" proprietor. He later founded the Moss Vale "Scrubineer" and was eventually returned to the Assembly as the Member for the Bowral electorate.

Messrs. Archibald Campbell and Hart assumed control of the "Mercury," the former eventually buying out his partner. Mr. Campbell was elected to represent the Illawarra electorate. He was an indefatigable worker for the advancement of the Illawarra district both as a parliamentarian and a newspaper proprietor.

Mr. Harry Rauch still living in Nowra and approaching his 90th birthday anniversary, was editor of the paper during Mr. Campbell's regime. Mr. Rauch severed his connections with the "Mercury" to establish a paper in Milton. He left that town to open the "Shoalhaven Telegraph" in Nowra.

After Mr. Campbell's death, the conduct of the paper was in the hands of his widow. She disposed of her interests to Mr. Edward Allen. This gentleman was a parliamentary representative for a short time. His successor was Mr. S. R. Musgrave.

In the early days of its history the "Mercury" moved from its first home to a building on the corner of Crown and Kembla streets. This building earlier had been a wine cellar. In 1927 the present building was erected in Church street and new machinery was installed.

Amongst the journalists associated with the "Mercury" were Mr. Frank Wilkinson, who became sporting editor of the now defunct "Evening News." There was Stephen Stanbridge, a prominent member of the "Worker" staff; D. J. Stewart, assistant editor of the "Sydney Mail"; George Walker, of the "Sydney Morning Herald."

Amongst those who contributed to the columns of the "Mercury" were John Dunmore Lang, C. C. Russell, Henry Kendall, Philip Lorimer and David Christie Murray.
The 91 years of the “Mercury’s” existence has seen the improvement of type-setting from the labourious hand-setting method to the modern type-setting machines. It has known the time when the news of the outside world was dependent on overseas papers, arriving months after they were published. Compare this today when an incident on the otherside of the world is reported in this country a few seconds later.

During those years the manner in which reports were written have changed. From long sonorous sentences, plenty of hyperbole and long paragraphs, the newspaper of today is written in short sentences and small paragraphs.

Some interesting paragraphs were read from early editions of the paper, while the speaker made brief references to the establishment of the coke-making industry. He also gave a short history of the School of Arts and a brief resume of the history of horse racing in the district.