



COORAN QLD



Name: Cooran Memorial School of Arts

Address: King Street, Cooran

The Town: Cooran is located in south eastern Queensland, in the northern Sunshine Coast hinterland. It is about 140 km north of Brisbane, 38km west of Noosa Heads and 8km west of Pomona. The population is 1,457 (2011 census). Cooran is within the local government area of the Shire of Noosa, in the State Electorate of Gympie and the Federal Division of Wide Bay. The name comes from *guaran*, a word from the Gubi Gubi people meaning tall trees or the Moreton Bay ash, a reference to the tall forest trees for which the area was known. This links to the Tall Trees Festival, first held in Cooran in 2009.

The town of Cooran came into being as a direct result of the discovery of gold by James Nash at Gympie in 1867. When the gold was first found, there was no direct road through to the diggings. Supplies had to come by sea to the port of Maryborough and then overland by horse and dray, bullock team and wagon. Travellers moved by Cobb and Co coach. A more direct route was needed and in 1870 Walter Hay explored a way overland allowing supplies to come by sea to Tewantin.

In the 1870s, the heavily timbered hills of the region also drew timber-getters, and selectors followed. In 1874 William Casey selected land along this new route, approximately halfway between Gympie and Tewantin (in other words Cooran). The travellers and carriers using the road found this a very convenient place to stop and rest.

It wasn't long before Mr. and Mrs. Casey were serving refreshments to these road users.



Their home became known as Casey's Halfway House and Stables, a changing place for horses as well as a rest stop for travellers. In 1877 there was a licence granted to serve alcohol. William Casey and his wife were well known for *providing the wants of the inner man and the comforts of the traveller, as well as their civility, cleanliness and good table, and of course the "Foster's bottled beer"*.

The Caseys were the first settlers at Cooran followed by William Martin in 1876, and in 1880 by Alexander Ferguson.

William Martin, who came to Gympie shortly after gold was discovered in 1867, was a very successful prospector and in 1876 -77 he selected two properties at Cooran. In 1881 he purchased the Half Way House from William Casey. Martin had extensive holdings of land in the area, some of which was resumed for the building of the new railway, including the land where the Halfway House stood. With this important facility demolished, Martin applied for the licence to transfer to other premises and built the Railway Hotel near the new Cooran railway station, continuing to benefit from the traffic through the region. The timbers from the Halfway House were thought to be used for other buildings in the town, though there is no certainty which of three buildings might have used it.

It wasn't until the railway was built from Gympie to Cooran in 1889 that settlement expanded, with the line further extending south to Brisbane in 1891. The railways department gave the name and the spelling of Cooran (COORAN) although according to an 1879 map of the region, the mountain behind the settlement was referred to as Mt. Cran.

In 1902, Pugh's Queensland directory recorded about thirty selectors, five timber getters and the Railway Hotel at Cooran built by William Martin. In 1925, the directory recorded about three times as many selectors, mostly involved in dairying, a second hotel (the Premier), several shops and a sawmill

Today, Cooran is a stopping place on the tourist route of the Sunshine Coast hinterland, supporting cafes and galleries. The 'tree-change' environment has generated much interest in the town, which has attracted new residents as a result.



**Timber Wagons
at Cooran**

Date unknown
(1925?)



Establishment: First, the Federal Hall

The Gympie Times reported on 6 June, 1905 –

Cooran has had an influx of Southern farmers and dairymen during the past three months, the like of which was not before seen, and Mr. McIlwraith of the Railway Hotel has been almost at his wits' end to provide accommodation for all.

In 1906, realising the need for land for new settlers and for businesses to serve them, William Martin subdivided a portion of his land holdings to provide allotments for housing, making these free of rent for a time, as well as for business premises. Martin also donated two acres of his land to the Education Department for a new school. This is still the site of the current school in James Street.

Martin also recognised the need for a place for the community to gather. The Queenslander reported on Saturday 28 April 1906 that *Mr William Martin is having plans prepared of a public hall to be built in Cooran* and he commissioned Mr. Charles Penrose to build an Assembly Hall. The land on which the hall was built was part of Portion 548 originally granted by Deed of Grant No 72082 to William Martin.

The building was to be 60ft by 25ft with a stage 12ft by 25ft, with seating for 200 persons, and two ante-rooms in the front of the building, *these to be of great assistance to the genial Jack McIlwraith, when the present sleeping accommodation at the hotel is over-taxed.*

On 23 June, 1906 The Gympie Times reported that the stumps had just been put in as foundations for the hall. It was built very quickly, as by 21 July, just five weeks later, the same newspaper reported that

.....the finishing touches were being put to Mr Martin's new hall up the hill from McIlwraith's Hotel. [The Railway Hotel].

It took just seven weeks from the stumps going in until the opening of the hall.

The official opening of Mr. Martin's Public Hall was held on Friday 17 August, 1906. Over 200 people attended the free grand social and dance, many of them driving or riding up to twenty miles to be present on this historic occasion. The hall was decorated with ferns, palms, wild flowers and flags and lighting was provided by three large Rochester lamps each of which held a gallon of oil. There were 22 dances on the programme and sixty-two couples took part in the Grand March. Refreshments were served at midnight and again at 5 o'clock in the morning, and the last dance on the programme was called at 5.30 a.m

The new hall was much used. It was the venue for political rallies and a designated polling booth for elections, and for meetings of a wide range of Cooran's local associations, including the Progress Association and the Agricultural Pastoral Horticultural and Industrial Society (APH and I Society). It was used for balls and dances, concerts and all kinds of entertainments, fund raising as well as simply for pleasure and recreation. Generously, William Martin often made his hall available without charge for fund raising events and on one such occasion, the hall was re-named the Federal Hall, probably to recognise the numbers of new settlers to the area who had come from the area called Federal in the northern rivers district of New South Wales.

It retained this name until after the First World War, when it was renamed as a memorial to the men of the district who had served in the war.



The hall was the site of significant events.

The Nambour Chronicle and North Coast Advertiser reported on Saturday 20 March 1909

One of the largest and most influential meetings ever held in Cooran took place last Saturday in the Federal Hall when the delegates from the different centres in the new shire met.....The ratepayers were almost unanimous in support of the new shire. The boundaries of the new shire were finally fixed.

The Brisbane Courier noted almost a year later on 11 March 1910

A new shire, called 'Noosa', has been constituted by the union of portions of the shires of Maroochy and Widgee.....Nominations for the positions of nine councillors will be received at the Federal Hall Cooran on March 31.

The election was held at the Federal Hall on Friday 29 April 1910 with fifteen candidates standing for the nine seats. It was reported that the rivalry between Pomona and Cooran resulted in strong support for the candidates from Cooroy. Counting of the votes was carried on through the night with the result finally known on the morning of Saturday 30 April. Remarkably, there were no informal votes recorded. Those elected were from Cooroy (4), Pomona (2) Tewantin, Pinbarren Creek, and Cooran, one each.

The first meeting of the new Noosa Shire Council was held in the Federal Hall Cooran on Wednesday 11 May 1910 where the poll was declared and the nine new councillors took up their new roles.

These events mark the building as of continuing historical significance. It is identified as a Local Heritage Place on the register of the Noosa Shire.

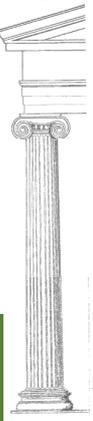
The entire lot on which the hall stands is designated a Protected Area.



**Panel from
Centenary Quilt**

This panel commemorates the first meeting of the Noosa Council 11 May 1910

William Martin retired in 1901 and handed over the running of the hotel to his daughter Alice and son in law John (Jack) McIlwraith. Alice McIlwraith inherited the Railway Hotel and the Federal Hall when her father died in 1916.



King Street Cooran ca 1924



King Street Cooran circa 1924

The Railway Hotel is at the bottom of the street on the left, partially obscured by a tree. Moving further up the hill, the buildings are the Post Office, the **Federal Hall** (modified and extended to become the **School of Arts Memorial Hall** in 1926) a shop, the Commercial Bank of Australia, shops. Mt Cooran in the background, overlooks the town.

This photograph is from the collection of the John Oxley Library, State Library of Queensland
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Link to digital item:

<http://hdl.handle.net/10462/deriv/104815>



And then..... The School of Arts:

While the Federal Hall met the need for a community meeting place and was the venue for important gatherings and entertainment in Cooran, it seems to have been recognised that the more serious aims and advantages of the School of Arts movement were lacking.

At a meeting of the Cooran Progress Association reported by The Brisbane Courier on 13 February 1913:

It was decided to form a School of Arts.

This newspaper further reported just two weeks later

The Cooran Progress Association met on Saturday night [22 February]. A special committee was formed to draw up a scheme for raising funds to erect a School of Arts.

There seemed to be little identifiable advance towards this goal although it had been proposed in 1917 to establish the School of Arts as a memorial to the men of the district who had fought in the First World War. But as late as November 1921, a regular Brisbane newspaper column on the game of draughts reported:

.....there is a movement to establish a School of Arts in the Cooran district. When it is established there is every likelihood of a draughts club being established.

Crown land had been allocated and a survey done in 1922. There were efforts to raise funds and the Sports Club joined with the School of Arts Committee to increase support for the project.

The Brisbane Courier of Friday 25 May 1923 recorded

A meeting of the School of Arts Committee was held in the Federal Hall on May 15 when the plans and specifications for the building were considered, and, by a majority vote, it was decided not to entertain them in their present form.

Real progress did not occur until late in 1924 when The Nambour Chronicle and North Coast Advertiser reported on 19 December

A meeting of the committee of the R S and S I League [the Returned Soldiers and Sailors Imperial League] who have been entrusted with the job of establishing a Memorial School of Arts in this town, was held last week with the purpose of deciding whether a building should be erected on the ground reserved by the Government, or the Federal Hall purchased from Mr J H McIlwraith. After discussion, the latter suggestion was adopted. To augment the funds required for improving and making substantial additions to the building it was resolved to commence immediately a Queen carnival which will continue until next Easter.

Three groups each nominated a candidate for Queen: the Diggers, the Banana Growers, and the Dairymen.

The plan was a great success with £585 [pounds] raised. The crowning ceremony in June 1925 for the Queen, the candidate raising the most money, was a great social occasion with each of the candidates being presented with a piece of gold jewellery as a memento. The Queen was Miss Thelma Smith, the Banana Growers candidate, who raised £233. The other candidates were for the Diggers, Miss Beth Lawrie and for the Dairymen, Miss M Brooker.



On 6 February 1925, The Nambour Chronicle recorded:

Over fifty residents attended a meeting called to further matters in connection with the proposed extensions and additions to the Federal Hall lately purchased by the RS and SI League for the purpose of establishing a Soldiers Memorial School of Arts..... A deputation comprising Messrs AE Diplock, AE Maher, and T Smith was appointed to interview the Home Secretary [of the Queensland Government] with a view to securing a subsidy on the amount collected, about £300.

The matter of electing five trustees of the Soldiers' Memorial was deferred to next April.

The duly appointed trustees were Thomas Smith, Edward Herbert Bengtsson, Florence John O'Rourke, George Marshall Sainsbury and Alexander McAffer Ferguson.

The Nambour Chronicle reported on Friday 22 May 1925 from a meeting of Noosa Council:

The representatives of the ground on which stands the Federal Hall at Cooran tendered a recent survey of the property, the building on which will shortly be converted into a Memorial School of Arts. Plan approved.

On Friday 3 July 1925 the report read

Plans and specifications as submitted by Mr S Prior (Brisbane) for the improvements and additions to the Federal Hall were adopted and it was decided to call tenders for the work.

Six months later on 1 January 1926, The Chronicle report was headed

Alteration to Memorial School of Arts

The committee of the above has accepted Mr Vick's (Gympie) tender for the proposed alterations and additions to the Soldiers Memorial School of Arts which is better known as the Federal Hall. The work will cost about £700.

The story of setting up the School of Arts reached its conclusion towards the end of 1926.

The Nambour Chronicle again reported on 15 October, a public meeting convened by the sub-branch of the R S and S I League for the purpose of setting out this body's activities in regard to the Memorial School of Arts. Mr AE Maher (president) presided.

When the Diggers took over the project some 18 months ago all that had been raised was £218. Resulting from a queen competition, other functions and canvassing, nearly another £900 had been raised, enabling the purchase of the Federal Hall at a cost of £500. At the present time the value of this property and fittings amounted to almost £1263 against which liabilities totalling in all £474, of which the biggest item was a bank overdraft of £378.

With generous assistance of the public, rents from the two shops in the hall, and renting it to a picture syndicate, they would soon be able to wipe off the debt and raise enough to further improve the building and stock its library with new books.

Responding to criticism of the committee's leasing of the hall to the picture syndicate, the president defended the action that it was.....*controlled in such a way as to be of financial benefit to the institution.*

The Diggers were congratulated on their achievements by a number of those in attendance.



Honour Board

1914-18 War

**Unveiled at the opening
of the Cooran Memorial
School of Arts**

16 October 1925

**Restored by QCWA
Cooran**

The building was formally opened on Saturday 16 October 1925 with the Honour Roll of the Soldiers for whom the hall stands as a Memorial, unveiled as part of the opening ceremonies. A grand Ball to celebrate the occasion was held the following Friday evening 22 October.

The Library with 1000 volumes was opened formally on 11 September 1926.

In 1930 the Cooran Branch of the QCWA (Queensland Country Women's Association) donated funds to improve the School of Arts. These funds had been originally intended to provide their own premises but instead, the Cooran QCWA was provided with rent free accommodation in the building and in turn, it provided ongoing support for the upkeep of the building. These arrangements continue to this day.

The Building: The Cooran Memorial School of Arts is a large chamferboard building, painted cream, with dark trim, with a corrugated iron roof and several gables, including one over the front porch. A set of steps leads from the road up to the level footpath then another set to the entrance.

In 1919 while the hall was closed because of the influenza epidemic, Jack McIlwraith put down a new floor with timbers especially selected to suit dancing. In January 1926,

Mr. Vick, a builder from Gympie, was given the contract for enlarging and renovating the hall. This included an extension on the southern side of the building as well as a two-storey front and storage area. It also included two new shops at street level, originally rented to provide income to repay the debt on the building. These shops have had many and varied tenants over the years. The upstairs room was used as a community library and supper room when it was constructed in 1926. In later years the library was stored in the third level room situated above the hall entrance. The books from the library were sold in 1947.

In 1946 electricity was connected to Cooran and the hall immediately installed electric lights.



The floor was replaced again in 1947 when Straker & Sons donated half the timber for the new floor and George Horsey, Max Geary and Alf Renshaw along with other hall committee members performed the work. It was finished to provide a surface especially suited for dancing. This is still the same floor in the hall today.

In 1949 timber was purchased from Straker & Sons sawmill to construct a ceiling in the hall and repairs to the guttering and installation of new tanks were finally achieved.

The very long awaited supper room extension on the northern side of the hall was erected in 1958. Originally this was a separate room with a wall between it and the main hall. The wall was removed in 1975, however the current committee have plans to redesign the supper room and re-erect the wall.

Social History: Cooran flourished in the 1920s with societies and clubs of all kinds being formed. Many of these, including the local Oddfellows and other Lodges, met regularly in the Memorial School of Arts and together with entertainments and social functions, the hall was in constant use. As well, the arrangement to show silent movies on a regular basis was a continuing source of funds. The hall committee purchased a pianola and Saturday evening showings proved popular. The opening night Special Features on 18 July 1925 included “One Week of Love” and “Daring Danger” !!

Community activities were always centred on the hall. Through the hard times of the Depression years and then all the support activities of the war years by the Red Cross and the Australian Comforts Fund, both of which provided the contents of parcels to the troops, the hall continued to be the base for gathering. Advertising meetings and functions was simple: posters were attached to trees by local timber truck drivers, or to the side of the cream trucks that went about the district collecting the cream cans. Everyone knew what events were happening in the town. Boxing matches became popular for a time and the picture shows continued until 1965 when this facility closed for lack of support.

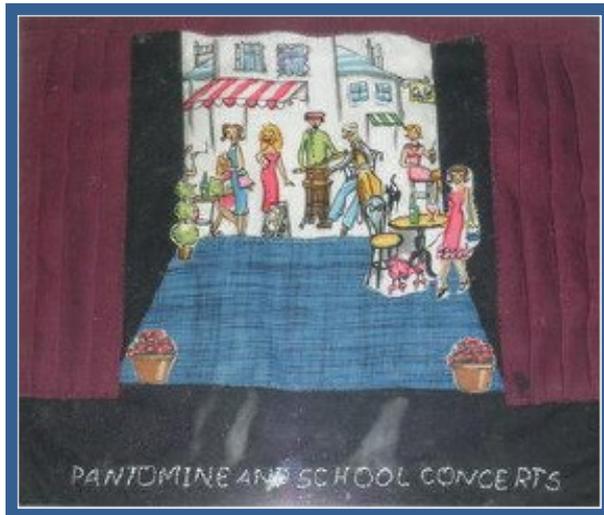
The Cooran Indoor Bowling Club was established in 1961 with the floor of the hall levelled to improve the bowling surface. The Club also improved the hall for the benefit of the players with the game, which proved very popular, being played weekly in the hall. But the 1960s also brought difficult times for Cooran, as for other small country towns. The sawmill closed and workers left to find other jobs. Houses were dismantled and moved from the area. Then in 1967, the local school organised a “Back to Cooran” Day which proved to be such a success that it has become an annual event held in the last Sunday in March each year.

During the past thirty years, and especially in the more recent period, the town has seen some growth with subdivision of surrounding land for housing. The School of Arts Memorial Hall became a multi purpose building used by many and varied groups and again the centre of community life. Theatrical productions by the Cooran State School and Cooran Youth Theatre Company (cyt.com) are now annual events. An adult theatre group called the Cooran Players began in 1995.

The Cooran Memorial School of Arts, like all clubs and associations, became an incorporated body in 1994 and the Cooran Acoustics Group, which formed in 1991, and the Cooran Players, now operate as sub-committees of the Cooran Memorial School of Arts Inc.



The fact that the hall has survived and been maintained shows how important it has been in the life of the town in good times and bad.



**Panel from
Centenary Quilt**

This panel depicts some of the ways in which the building has been used:

‘Pantomime and School Concerts’

There has been an ongoing program of improvement. In 1992, when the Cooran Fruitgrowers Association wound up, they donated significant funds to the hall committee enabling the construction at the rear of the building of an extension which included a change room, extra toilet facilities and sewerage works.

Refurbishment of the kitchen, extensions to the stage, installation of sound and lighting systems, restumping of the hall, roof repairs, and painting of the hall both inside and out have all been achieved thanks to the work of local volunteers and grant allocations from the Noosa Shire Council and the State Government.

In January 2014, the Queensland Government allocated \$33.500 for renovation and upgrade of kitchen facilities.

Currently (2014): Trusteeship of the Hall is no longer in the hands of the members of the Cooran community having been transferred in 1985 to the Council of the Shire of Noosa under the same terms of trusteeship as the original trustees –
“ to hold the land upon trust for the purposes of a School of Arts and Public Hall”.

The Hall today is the venue for a variety of community activities. The Cooran Acoustics Group continues to hold a monthly acoustics night, and craft groups, exercise and yoga groups meet weekly in the hall.

hausmusik.com.au brings the best artists from around the world to the 108 year old Cooran Memorial School of Arts Hall, which has a wonderful acoustic for classical music. hausmusik and friends raised the funds to purchase a Yamaha baby grand piano which is securely housed at the back of the stage.

The hall is hired as a venue for birthday parties, public meetings, theatre productions and rehearsals, and the shops can still be rented for commercial purposes.

Aline Gillespie, Historian, said in her presentation to the 2002 Cooran Heritage Recalled Weekend - *It is important for a town like Cooran to retain its identity, for the current generation and for those to come. A building like this hall needs to be used and nurtured, as it holds so many memories of the town's origins.*

“Cherish your Hall, Use It and Enjoy It”



**Community Events
in Cooran**

**Notice Board
2013**

Acknowledgements: Noosa Pomona Museum

Gerri and George Hillier, Cooran Memorial School of Arts

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