



GINNINDERRA NSW/ACT



The Old Store at Ginninderra, location for the first Ginninderra School of Arts

Name: Ginninderra School of Arts (also Farmers' Union Hall)

The Place:

Ginninderra survives only as a name applied to a range of entities in the Australian Capital Territory. All of the sites presently carrying the name are located in the region once called Ginninderra. It was an area of productive agricultural land on the north and west fringes of what is now Canberra, Australia's federal capital city.

In the earliest references to the area, the name was written as Ginning-derry but by the mid 19th century, it became Ginninderra (sometimes spelt Gininderra, with 'n' first, instead of 'nn'). The name derives from a word in the language of the local Ngunnawal people: *ginnin-ginning-derry* for the creek which runs through the district and is said to mean 'sparkling' or 'throwing off little rays of light'. It is also thought that the name might be from the fall of water, now called Ginninderra Falls, in the gorge through which the creek flows. The area has been subsumed in the Canberra districts of Belconnen and Gungahlin and includes the watershed of Ginninderra Creek, part of the catchment of the Murrumbidgee River in the Murray-Darling system draining a large part of eastern Australia.

Major European settlement of the area began in 1826 with the establishment of the Palmerville Estate by George Palmer. This adjoined the Charnwood Estate to the west and together their combined area was more than 20,000 acres (about 8000 hectares). Colonial surveyor Robert Hoddle visited the area several times between 1830 and 1836 to survey



property boundaries. Hoddle also made water colour sketches of the region, which are in the collection of the National Library of Australia in Canberra.

The Palmerville Estate, more generally known as Ginninderra, was managed by William Davis who married George Palmer's daughter, Susan Adrianna. When Palmer* died, his daughter inherited the estate. This prospered under the management of Davis who later selected and added Gungahlin*, increasing the acreage still further. The estate was managed in turn by Edward Kendall Crace* who had married Kate Mort of the pastoral and wool broking family with broad interests in many parts of the colony. Crace bought out Davis's interest in 1880 and in the same year, bought neighbouring Charnwood* making him one of the largest landholders in the district.

Edward Crace also upgraded and extended Gungahlin Homestead¹ (called Goongarline or later, Gungahleen) built between 1862 and 1865 by Davis. It is one of just a few significant homestead buildings remaining in the ACT. Since 1953, its extensive acreage has been under the control of the CSIRO as an experimental station for wildlife research, called Ginninderra Research Station, now part of the CSIRO Division of Ecosystem Sciences.

EK Crace died in 1892 crossing the flooded creek while returning home from Ginninderra. He was succeeded by his son Everard Gregory Crace who took over the management of the Gungahlin Estate by 1900, although he and his wife and family continued to reside in Ginninderra where they became influential in the life of the village.

A second wave of settlement which occurred in the district in the 1850s brought free settlers including the Rolfe, Schumack, Gillespie, and Gribble families, establishing wheat and sheep properties such as Weetangerra* Gold Creek* and others. It was predominantly a wheat growing area especially for the small landholders who supplied produce for the population, as well as for the large concentrations of workers in the region's goldfields, including Braidwood and Major's Creek. In the first part of the 20th century Ginninderra developed a reputation for the production of high quality merino wool. Henry Curran of Deasland, near Ginninderra Village achieved a world record price at auction.

Ginninderra had never been proclaimed as a village site but had 'just grown' as a gathering place for the many workers employed by the large estates nearby, some of whom had their own small holdings. In its heyday, it was more important than Canberra and for many years it boasted the most famous cricket team in the colony, a team which included three Aborigines, brothers Johnny and Jimmy Taylor and Bobby Deumonga, who consistently performed better than their other team mates.

On 21 October 1915, 910 square miles of land including the Ginninderra and Gungahleen Estates were resumed to create the Federal Capital Territory, the whole area being formerly part of the state of New South Wales. Following the federation of the States in 1901 to create the Commonwealth of Australia, a decision was made to build a capital city for the new nation. The site was chosen in 1908. On 1 January 1911 under the terms of the *Federal Capital Territory Act*, an area located between rivals Melbourne and Sydney, the two major cities of Australia, was ceded by the Government of New South Wales and designated the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) with its boundaries surveyed and marked. As a result, Ginninderra became part of this new region, now known as the Australian Capital Territory (ACT).

* Names of places and settlers in Ginninderra survive in present day Canberra, allocated to suburbs and streets in the local area: eg Palmerston is the name of the first suburb built in the district of Gungahlin; Crace is also a suburb of Gungahlin. Gold Creek is a tourist locality which includes the few surviving historic buildings of Ginninderra Village.

¹ In February 2015, the Gungahlin Homestead building was made available for a peppercorn rent to the charitable organization **Soldier On**, set up to support troops experiencing problems as a result of their service.



Establishment:

The beginning.....1899

The Ginninderra Store was an important focus for the people of the village and its surrounds. But it closed finally in 1897, largely as a result of drought and economic depression, although the building had been used for other purposes, including as a venue for social functions, for a little time previously. The local residents, with strong community spirit, formed two new organisations in the late 1890s: a gymnasium was opened in the old Store in July 1898, attracting immediately a membership of 20. In May 1899, the Queanbeyan Age reported on a meeting in the gymnasium hall attended by about 40 persons, including most of the district's prominent residents. Those present at the meeting decided to form a School of Arts and Debating Club.

The only building available at the time was the Old Ginninderra Store, so it was proposed that this be used as the School of Arts until such time as a more suitable building might be acquired. It was also agreed that subscriptions be 2/- per quarter for gentlemen, 1/6 for ladies, those under 16 years, half price. The appointment of officers took place with James McCarthy Esq JP being appointed President.

July 1899 saw reports of a most successful meeting of the School of Arts. The Reading Room was being furnished, books purchased for the Library and the intention stated to add chess, draughts, and other amusements, as well as to form a Dramatic Club.

Just weeks after its establishment, the School of Arts held a concert and social in aid of the Library fund. Several of the leading vocalists of Queanbeyan and Gundaroo willingly offered their services, making the evening a great success. The concert was followed by dancing to music provided by Messrs Lake and Williams with Henry Oldfield as Master of Ceremonies. The evening was stated to be "without doubt the most successful affair which has been held for the last twenty years" with between 250 and 300 people attending.

By as early as June 1900 there was a report that the committee had not been working in unison "as several heated altercations have taken place".

But the annual Concert and Ball in aid of the School of Arts was held in the Old Store in November 1900 and proved a splendid success, the Queanbeyan Age reporting

".... that the Secretary Mr Charles Thompson and an able committee had made every possible arrangement for a successful gathering and their efforts were crowned with success. The room was transformed into a gay scene of splendour by the tasteful decorations and designs that hid the walls completely. Flags emblems mottoes greenery and bright splashes of colour gave warmth and joy to the beholder."

Guests travelled long distances for the occasion coming from Queanbeyan, Gundaroo, and even further.

In September 1901 at the Annual Meeting of the School of Arts, the following office bearers were elected:

President: James McCarthy JP
 Vice President: Everard Gregory Crace
 Treasurer: Henry Roland Curran
 Secretary: Charles William Thompson
 Committee: George Kendall Kinlyside
 James Cavanagh
 William Alexander
 James Michael Reardon
 Thomas Gribble junior
 Librarian: George Ward Harcourt



Just a year later, in October 1902, there were signs of collapse. “Ginninderra Whispers”² reported that a meeting had recently been held to consider the position.

“After a little discussion it was resolved to disorganise the School of Arts on the grounds that it was not afforded sufficient support.....

We regret the loss of the institution as it is essential to every community, no matter how small it may be, but it is impossible to keep it going in a community so sparsely populated as in Ginninderra.”

As well, the Old Store building was destroyed by bushfires in 1905 so there seemed no possibility of a revival, lacking any suitable meeting place for activities.

A second chance.....1906

Meanwhile, also in 1905, the Ginninderra Farmers’ Union was formed, after having been mooted first in 1884. Everard Gregory Crace became President and Charles William Thompson, the schoolmaster at the Ginninderra School, Secretary. One of the Union’s first activities was to organise a sports meeting in Crace’s Bandicoot Paddock to raise funds to erect a building for use as a venue for both the Union’s various meetings and social activities, and for the School of Arts. A sports meeting and ball, held in June 1906 to provide funds for the School of Arts, proved a grand success. The ball took place in the Ginninderra Woolshed and exhibitions of step dancing were given between dances.

In July, Mr Crace was reported to be negotiating with the Gungahleen estate for a grant of land for the proposed School of Arts. From the Annual Meeting of the Farmers’ Union in August 1906, the Queanbeyan Age reported on the remarks of President Mr EG Crace: Proceeds of fund raising sports and balls are directed to the erection of the Farmers’ Union Hall at Ginninderra, which is almost completed. The latter building will also be utilised by the School of Arts.....

“The School of Arts will prove a valuable adjunct to the Union in providing books and magazines dealing with the scientific side of farming and this will supply a long felt want.”

The Queanbeyan Age reported again on events in the Ginninderra district in the edition of Tuesday 4 September 1906:

“A public meeting was held on Saturday last for the purpose of establishing a School of Arts in the neighbourhood. Mr Crace was voted to the chair and explained the object of the meeting.....It was unanimously decided to establish a School of Arts in Ginninderra”.

A Committee was elected by the meeting and Mr Crace, the elected President, together with a Vice-President, Mr Charles Thompson, were appointed to draw up rules for the management of the institution to be submitted to a meeting of subscribers by 18 September. Thirty people had already signified their intention to join and it was expected that the enrolment of members would very soon reach fifty. A ball was planned for October to raise funds to completely furnish the hall and wipe off the debt on this new building which would be the focus of the institution’s activities.

The Queanbeyan Age reported on the opening of the new building by the President’s mother, Kate Marion Crace, on Saturday 8 September 1906 in the presence of a large crowd. A sports meeting held in the afternoon followed by a dance in the evening marked the occasion.

² James Gillespie (The Wizard) wrote the notes “Ginninderra Whispers” for the *Goulburn Evening Penny Post* for nearly forty years up to 1941. Some of the stories in this account are from his reports and appear in the publication *Ginninderra, forerunner to Canberra: a history of the Ginninderra district*: Lyall Gillespie (1992).



The Building: 1906; 1910; 1930s.....

The hall was a substantial weatherboard structure adjoining 'Deasland' the property of Mrs Harcourt. It was erected at a cost of £73, a sum raised entirely by the local residents without any government subsidy, which they neither asked for nor were offered. Mr Smith, the contractor, had given every satisfaction and it was believed that the building would be a great acquisition to the area. The dimensions were 36 feet x 17 feet with one end partitioned off as a ladies room and library. It was proposed that later on, when some contemplated improvements were effected, it would be thoroughly up-to-date. The Hall was constantly in use as the School of Arts, with a gymnasium, library, entertainment centre and lecture room.

In February 1910 Mr CW Thompson, Secretary of the Farmer's Union, invited tenders for alterations and the erection of additions and two skillion rooms. The tender of Mr Sacagio of Queanbeyan was accepted. The additions were completed in May at a cost of £62.

The Queanbeyan Age reported on these improvements:

"The building is now 40 feet x 18 feet with an excellent stage 18 feet x 11 feet and two ante rooms 15 feet x 11 feet. A piano has been placed in the hall. Queanbeyan Dramatic Society has already put in a performance in the new hall".

...the beginning of the end: 1915

In 1914 the Secretary reported that the Committee had been called upon by the Federal authorities to place a 'valuation for resumption' on the hall. Not only the hall, but also the land of the Ginninderra district was being acquired as part of the new Federal Capital Territory. A meeting in July decided to accept the Federal Government's offer of £250 for the building. Funds held by the Farmers' Union and the School of Arts were disbursed to local hospitals, Churches (of all denominations) and the Crippled Soldiers' Relief Fund.



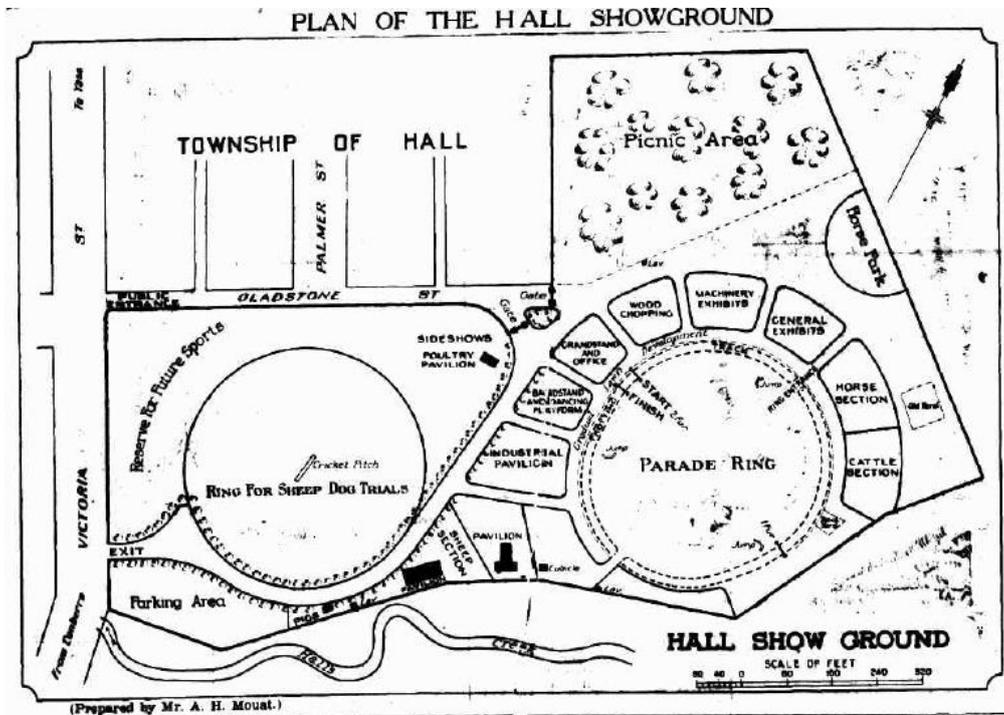
Moving the building from Ginninderra to Hall Village in 1930.



1930.....

The building, formerly the Farmers' Union Hall and Ginninderra School of Arts and now resumed as property of the FCT, was moved to Hall Village to be used as a pavilion at the Showground. It was moved in half sections on a jinker towed by Gribble's traction engine. A ring was cleared adjoining the existing ground to locate the hall.

The plan below shows the location of the pavilion, the former Ginninderra Farmers' Union Hall and School of Arts, at the bottom centre of the diagram, identified simply as 'PAVILION'.



Published in The Canberra Times Thursday 28 September 1933 p.5.
Plan prepared by Mr AH Mouatt.

Social History:

The new hall was immediately much used by the Ginninderra community, including by the members of the School of Arts. By December 1906, just a few months after its opening, it was reported that the Library was stocked by "a splendid supply of well selected books", many donated by Mr Crace. Shortly afterwards, in March 1907, the Queanbeyan Leader reported again that

"A debating class is being initiated....This should enable the young men of the district an excellent opportunity of which it is hoped they will take advantage to improve themselves as public speakers."

In June 1907 a grand ball was organised in support of the School of Arts. Reporting on the event, the Queanbeyan Age noted:

"Needless to say the arrangements were excellent and reflected great credit on the ladies concerned. Mrs Crace takes a deep interest in the School of Arts, as well as every movement for the welfare of the district.....

The spacious shed was tastefully decorated by the committee and presented a picturesque effect when filled with the busy dancers. Sixty couples were present.....

The catering....was of a very superior kind...and all concerned are to be congratulated on the splendid success of the gathering."

An interesting postscript was added:



“Your correspondent regrets that he was unable to get a full list of the ladies present, together with a description of their dresses, and as he is a fairly discreet mortal prefers to give none in preference to leaving out one.” [!!]

The Queanbeyan Age reported on the Annual General Meeting of the School of Arts in July 1907:

“There was a fair attendance of members present, who expressed pleasure at the very satisfactory report and balance sheet which was adopted unanimously..... The enrolment of members was satisfactory and 340 volumes had been issued to members. The committee had expended £10 in books, furnished the Hall, and were installing a billiard table in the building.”

The meeting also recorded grateful thanks to Mrs EG Crace for her interest in the institution, noting that she was tireless in her support, including organising fund raising events to promote the growth of the School of Arts. Election of the new committee followed, with Mr EG Crace re-elected as President. In June of the following year, it was reported that the School of Arts was in a flourishing condition. The enrolment of members was large and increasing, much of the success due to the exertions of the worthy secretary, Mr George Harcourt.

At the end of 1908, the committee of the Farmers’ Union invited their members to participate in a social evening which included members of the School of Arts. The hall was prettily decorated, there was music for dancing, with songs rendered between dances. Cards and other amusements were available for those who wished to play and all spent a most enjoyable time. It was pronounced as the forerunner of many such gatherings and both groups were urged to work together for their mutual benefit.

A social and euchre party was organised by the School of Arts in 1910. In recognition of their services, presentations were made in the course of the evening to two worthy and admired members of the institution: Blanche Crace (Mrs EG Crace) and Mr Charles Thompson, the local school master, both of whom had done so much to encourage the establishment of the School of Arts as a place of interest and improvement, as well as for entertainment.

The hall was the centre of community life in Ginninderra. It was the setting for meetings and lectures and for political rallies and speeches: Mr Austin Chapman, MP for Eden-Monaro and a Minister in the Federal Government, was reported to have addressed a gathering in the School of Arts for two hours. [!] Lectures on scientific measures to improve agriculture in the region realised the vision of the Farmers’ Union to have a hall as a venue for such lectures. It was the focus for gatherings of all kinds, including the Annual Balls for the School of Arts and the Ginninderra Show. The local sporting clubs, especially the tennis and cricket clubs, held their social functions as well as their meetings in the hall.

Nearby Hall Village had meanwhile developed rapidly, to the cost of Ginninderra. A report on an early request to move the Police Station to Hall shows the extent of feeling:

“I hear that the residents of Hall are anxious to have our local police station removed to that village. Well, as the residents of Ginninderra are a very honest, peaceable, and well-behaved little community, if police protection is urgently required at Hall I can see no reason why the desire of our neighbours should not be granted. It should, however, be on the strict understanding that they will not agitate for the removal of the Ginninderra Creek to their village also.”³

But finally, the establishment of the Federal Capital Territory, with the consequent resumption of land and even the hall, removed the community focus for Ginninderra. It never recovered.

³ The Wizard. *Goulburn Evening Penny Post*: 12 May 1900 p.1



Mr. E. G. Crace, President



Mrs. E. G. Crace.



Mr. Chas. W. Thompson, Hon. Secretary.

Mr EG (Everard) Crace and
Mrs (Blanche) Crace

Mr Charles W Thompson (left)

All were influential in the
establishment and support of the
School of Arts in Ginninderra.

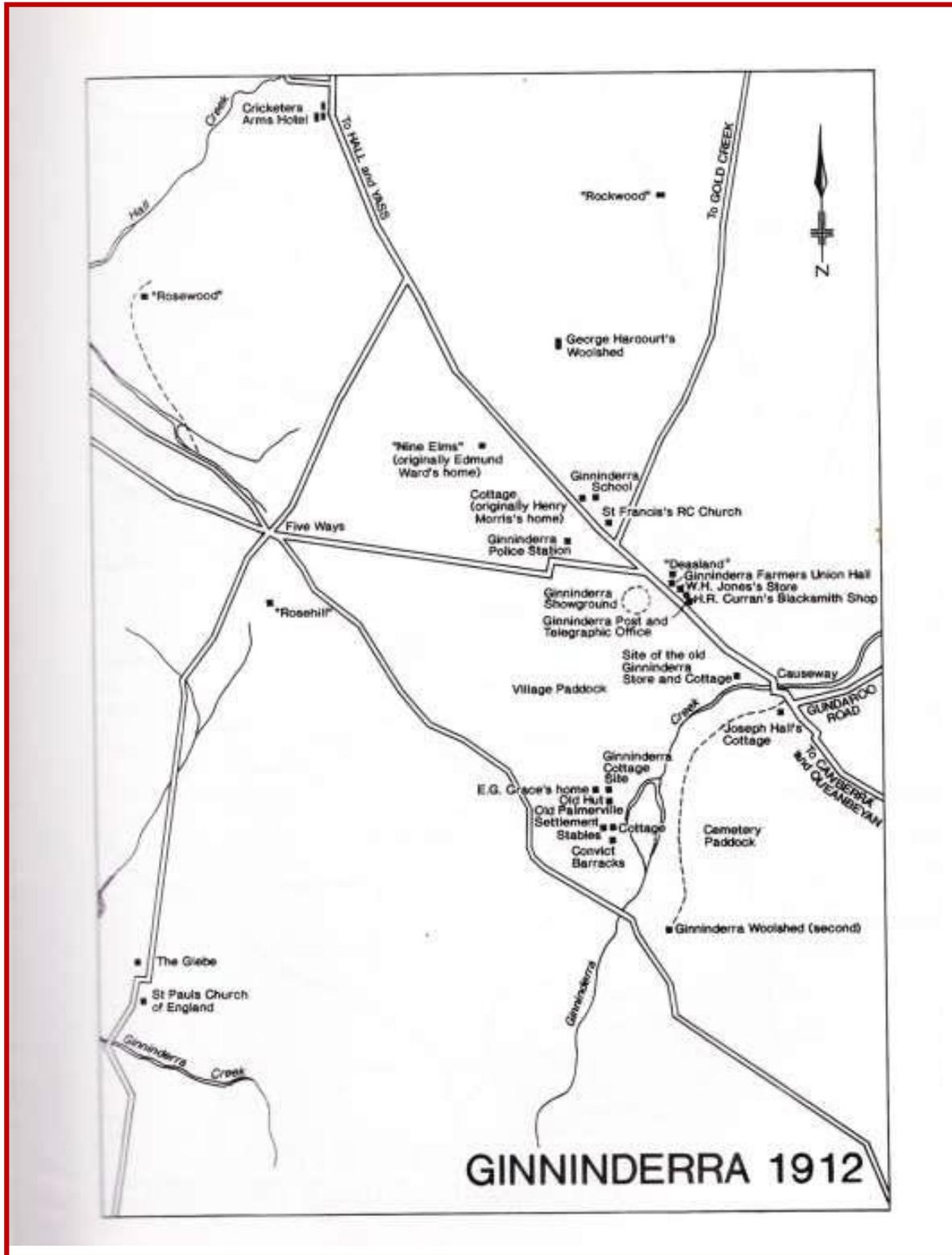
Currently (2014):

The site of Ginninderra is now not marked by this name on any map, the very few remaining buildings of the village being part of a tourist complex used for commercial purposes and presently called Gold Creek. The name, Ginninderra, is commemorated in one of the electorates for ACT government⁴ encompassing much of the former region; in the lake formed by damming the creek; a High School, and a Secondary College in the ACT; and a major arterial road linking the area with other districts of Canberra.

The nearby village of Hall, surveyed in the early 1880s, supplanted Ginninderra, having developed to the point where its facilities took over from the Post Office, Public School, Police Station, Churches and other public amenities already approved and operating much earlier in Ginninderra. Even the School of Arts building was eventually moved to Hall to form part of the improvements to the Hall Showgrounds, where its site is identified today as part of the Heritage Trail marked out by the ACT Government. Despite its supplanting Ginninderra, no School of Arts or institution of a similar kind was ever developed in Hall.

The resumption of the Farmers' Union and School of Arts Hall caused the disbandment of these organisations. Their passing meant the loss of the strong community spirit that had prevailed for so long and with that, the village itself. The area includes now the district of Gungahlin in the ACT with a proliferation of new suburbs and associated development. Sadly, there is little trace of the former community of Ginninderra.

⁴ Currently under review as a result of the proposed increase in 2016 from three to five ACT Government electorates. Because of adjustment to the boundaries, this might also bring changes in the existing names: Ginninderra, Molonglo and Brindabella.



Map of Ginninderra⁵ showing:

South of the road to Hall and Yass

- Old Ginninderra Store* and Cottage
- EG Crace's home (very near Ginninderra Creek)

North of the Hall/Yass Road

- Deasland
- Farmers' Union Hall (inc. School of Arts)
- HR Curran's Blacksmith Shop●

*Site of the first School of Arts

● The blacksmith's shop still stands on this site

⁵ Map from *Ginninderra, forerunner to Canberra: a history of the Ginninderra district*. Lyall Gillespie, Canberra 1992 p.153



Acknowledgements:

My thanks to Neil Gillespie for the photograph from the collection of his father, historian Lyall Gillespie, of the School of Arts building being moved to Hall Village Showground in 1930; and for his kind permission to reproduce it in this account.

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Queanbeyan Leader
Queanbeyan Age
Canberra Times

Maps:

Ginninderra 1912 from *Ginninderra, forerunner to Canberra (Lyall Gillespie) p.153*
Plan of Hall Showground: <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-page649901> (accessed 25 October 2014)
Canberra Times 28 September 1933 p.5

Archival photos:

Wikipedia: *Old Ginninderra Store ca 1890*

Gillespie collection: *Moving the building to Hall Village Showground 1930*

Queanbeyan Age Friday 15 October 1915: *EG Crace, Mrs Crace; Charles Thompson*
<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-page4326758> (accessed 12 October 2014)

The Souvenir Illustrated Report in The Queanbeyan Age carries the following acknowledgement:
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The blocks are the work of the Randle Photo Engraving Co. Ltd., Sydney

Research and Compilation: Helen Creagh, Member ADFAS Molonglo Plains*

ADFAS Molonglo Plains*

November 2014

*At this date, ADFAS Molonglo Plains is in its establishment phase, managed by an enthusiastic Steering Committee chaired by Sally Osborne who is, coincidentally, a member of the Crace family. The inaugural lecture for Molonglo Plains was in April 2014 and it is building towards membership of the Association of ADFAS.