



# BOOROWA NSW



**Name: Mechanics' Institute**

**Address: 65 Pudnam Street Boorowa**

## **The Town:**

Boorowa is located in southern New South Wales, 243 kilometres west of Sydney, 66 kilometres from Yass and almost in the centre of the Boorowa Shire. The population (2006 census) is 1070. Situated on the Boorowa River, a tributary of the Lachlan with the Murrumbidgee to the south, the town lies in a valley surrounded by undulating hills among rich river flats and fertile soils from an extinct volcano (Mount Canemumbola).

Industry consists mainly of wheat, fat lambs, wool production and cattle breeding. Mining was once a major industry with gold copper and iron mined in the nineteenth century. The name of the region was originally spelt as Burrowa and these two versions are said to be Aboriginal words for birds native to the region but long since gone.

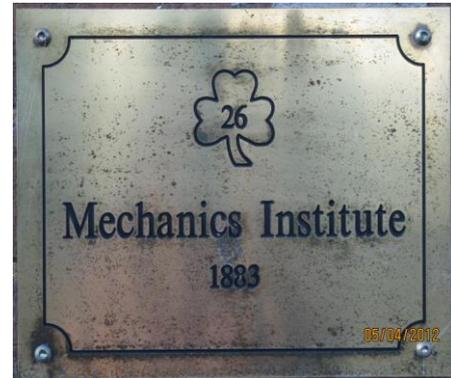
The surveyor, George Evans, travelled through this area in 1815 and unofficial occupation of the district began in 1821 with Irishmen Rodger Corcoran and Ned Ryan, both former convicts who had received their 'ticket of leave' from the Governor. Besides the Irish ticket of leave men who had settled in the area, free settlers came in the 1840s and 50s as a result of the potato famine in Ireland and the Highland Clearances in Scotland.



The large number of Irish settlers gave Boorowa a distinctive society and culture which still remains today. Visitors can follow the Shamrock Trail through the town centre to discover Boorowa's interesting history and many heritage buildings including the Old Dairy (1854) and the Mechanics' Institute (1883); the Dynamite Store of Webb and Crego (1862) which was held up by the bushranger Ben Hall in 1863; and The Model Store (1918) which was an early 20<sup>th</sup> century emporium.

### **The Shamrock Trail:**

Marking the route (above)  
and the historic buildings (right)



### **Establishment: 1875-1884:**

The idea to establish a Mechanics' Institute in Boorowa was first suggested in January 1875, based on the first Mechanics' Institute established in Edinburgh in 1821. Nearly fifty people met at the Court House in June 1878 and formed a committee for the erection of the Mechanics' Institute as well as applying to the Government for a grant of land. The aim of such an institution was to 'educate and elevate the tone of the town'.

The evolution of the Boorowa Mechanics' Institute was influenced by the long and drawn out differences of the opposing factions, Catholic and Protestant, during these turbulent years. The land offered by the Government was on Section 13 at the corner of Jugiong and Court Streets. There was strong opposition to this site and others were suggested. These included a site in Brial Street adjoining the bank; the Recreation Reserve opposite the Post Office; and the corner of Court and Pudnam Streets. Finally, 65 Pudnam Street became the accepted site. It was Mr J Stevenson who donated an acre of land in Pudnam Street for the new Mechanics' Institute but this was met with a barrage of criticism as some people questioned Stevenson's motives for the donation. Edward Twynam, the District Surveyor, criticised the people's conduct throughout the whole affair, labelling it as 'petty divisions'.

### **The Building: 1884 -1937**

James Watson placed 500 pounds in the 1879 estimates for the building and of this amount, 163 pounds was claimed in May 1881. A further 479 pounds was also raised for the building. The Boorowa Mechanics' Institute was opened on 'Anniversary Day' (26 January) 1884 by TM Slattery MLA.

George Patterson replaced the flooring in July 1889. A lumber room was added to the building in 1893-94; iron railings were installed on the front porch by McMurtrie Brothers in 1903; and three hitching posts for horses were placed in front of the Hall in 1904, along with a new paling fence. A Reading Room was opened in May 1906 and flooring replaced in 1908 to accommodate the popular pastime of skating. A Gallery was added to the south side of the building by JJ Cummins at a cost of 67 pounds; and the flooring was again replaced in 1923.



The opening hours of the Library were 4 to 5 pm on Saturday to Members. The books available were advertised in *The Burrowa News* of 31 August 1888, listed under categories including Novels and Miscellaneous and the significant addition of the donated Campbell Memorial Library. In 1889 the Library opened on Wednesdays and Saturdays and by 1900 it contained two thousand books. See below for a section of the published list.

<b>THE BURROWA NEWS: FRIDAY, AUGUST 31,</b>		
<p><b>Mechanics' Institute,</b> BURROWA.</p> <p><b>L</b>IST of BOOKS in the LIBRARY.—</p> <p><b>Campbell Memorial Library.</b></p> <p>Adventures in South Africa (Cumming.) A Naturalist's Voyage (Darwin.) Artic Exploration (Kane.) Africa, Japan, and Fiji (Petman.) Autobiography, by Mill. Advice to Young Men (Cobbett.) Australian Botany (Guilfoyle.) Alfred the Great (Hughes.) Amateur Carpenter (Davidson.) Albert Ny-Anza (Baker.) Astronomy (Herchel.) Arnold, Life of, 2 vols. (Stanley.)</p> <p>Burns' Poetic Works. Bright's Speeches. Ben Jonson's Dramatic Works. Bacon's Essays. Burke's Speeches. Both Worlds (Binney.) Bacon's Life (Church.) Botany (Hentrey.) Botanical Dictionary (Paxton.) Beaconsfield, Public Life of, (Hitchman.)</p> <p>Campbell's Poetic Works. Curiosities of Literature (D'Israeli.) Curran's Speeches. Chinese Gordon, 2 vols. (Hake.) Charles Kingsley (Mrs. Kingsley.) Civilization in England, 3 vols. (Buckle.) Cosmos, 5 vols. (Humboldt.) Cattle (Youatt.) Chess (Staunton.) Classical Dictionary (Lempriere)</p> <p>David Livingstone (Blakie.) Dickens, Life of, (Ward.) De Quincey, Life of, (Masson.) Dictionary of Quotations, Dictionary of Dates (Haydn.)</p> <p>Essays, by Huxley. Eight years in Ceylon (Baker.) Easy Star Lessons (Proctor.) Expansive Heaven, The (Proctor.)</p> <p>Friends in Council, 2 vols. Fifteen Decisive Battles (Creasy.) Fragments of Science, 2 vols. (Tyndall.) Forces of Nature (Faraday.) Faraday, Life of, 2 vols. (Dr. Jones.) Faraday (Tyndall.)</p> <p>Grattan's speeches. Gladstone (Smith.) Goethe, Life of, (Lewes.) Goldsmith, Life of, (Black.)</p>	<p>World of Anecdote (Hood.) Wealth of Nations (Adam Smith.)</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>NOVELS.</b></p> <p><b>BROUGHTON, RHODA.</b> Not Wisely, but Too Well. Nancy. Cometh Up as a Flower. Good-Bye, Sweetheart. Doctor Cupid.</p> <p><b>BESANT and RICE.</b> The Ten Years' Tenant. The Golden Butterfly. Ready Money Mortiby. All Sorts and Conditions of Men. Monks of Thelema.</p> <p><b>BRADDON, MISS.</b> Asphodel. Henry Dunbar. Taken at the Flood. Only a Clod. Birds of Prey. An Open Verdict. Vixen. The Golden Calf.</p> <p><b>BLACK, WILLIAM.</b> MacLeod of Dare. A Princess of Thule.</p> <p><b>BUCHANAN, ROBERT.</b> Shadow of the Sword. A Child of Nature. God and The Man. Martyrdom of Madeline. Love Me For ever.</p> <p><b>BLACKMORE, R. D.</b> Christowell. Cradock Nowell.</p> <p><b>COLLINS, WILKIE.</b> After Dark. Man and Wife. New Magdalen. Heart and Science. The Dead Secret. Miss or Mrs. Armadale. No Name. Little Novels.</p> <p><b>CARLETON, WILLIAM.</b> Willy Reilly. The Irish Agent.</p> <p><b>COOPER, FENIMORE J.</b> The Pathfinders. Last of the Mohicans.</p> <p><b>CONWAY, HUGH.</b> Bound Together.</p> <p><b>DICKENS, CHARLES.</b> 21 vols. Christmas Stories. Edwin Druid. Tale of Two Cities. Oliver Twist. Dombey and Son. Pickwick Papers. David Capperfield.</p>	<p><b>MELVILLE, G. J. WHITE.</b> Holmby House. Interpreter. Queen's Mariae. Good for Nothing. Roy's Wife. Satanella.</p> <p><b>MATHERS, HELEN.</b> Jock o' Hazelgreen. Story of a Sin. My Lady Green Sleeves. Comin' Thro' the Rye.</p> <p><b>OUIDA.</b> Signa. Chandos. Moths. Strathmore. Idalia.</p> <p><b>RUSSELL, W. CLAREKE.</b> The Golden Hope.</p> <p><b>THACKERAY, 13 vols.</b> Vanity Fair. Pendennis. The Newcomes. Henry Esmond. Barry Lyndon. The Virginians. Shabby Genteel Story. Adventures of Philip. Paris Sketch Book. Samuel Titmarsh. Book of Snobs. Roundabout Papers. Catherine. Lovel the Widower. Denis Duval. Christmas Books. Critical Reviews.</p> <p><b>VICTOR HUGO.</b> Toilers of the Sea. By Order of the King. Fantine. Les Miserables. Notre Dame.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>MISCELLANEOUS.</b></p> <p>Art Union, 1 vol. (Journal.) Australian Magazine, The, 15 parts. Architecture (Aldrich.) Asiatic Journal, The, 1 part. British Essayists, 37 vols. Book of the Garden, 2 vols. (M'Intosh.) Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, 32 parts. British Quarterly Review, 1 part. Cosmos, 2 vols. (Humboldt.) Civil War in America, 2 vols. (Abbott.) Charge Delivered by Lord Bishop of London. Catalogue of Scientific Instruments. Edinburgh Review, 8 parts. Exhibition Juries' Reports, 1851, 3 vols.</p>



The building was badly neglected at the time the Country Women’s Association (CWA) purchased and took over the building in 1937. They began to improve and renovate the property as well as adding a children’s playground. The CWA also conducted the Library until it was taken over by the Regional Library Service in 1952.

The building is now privately owned by a trucking company.

**Uses:**

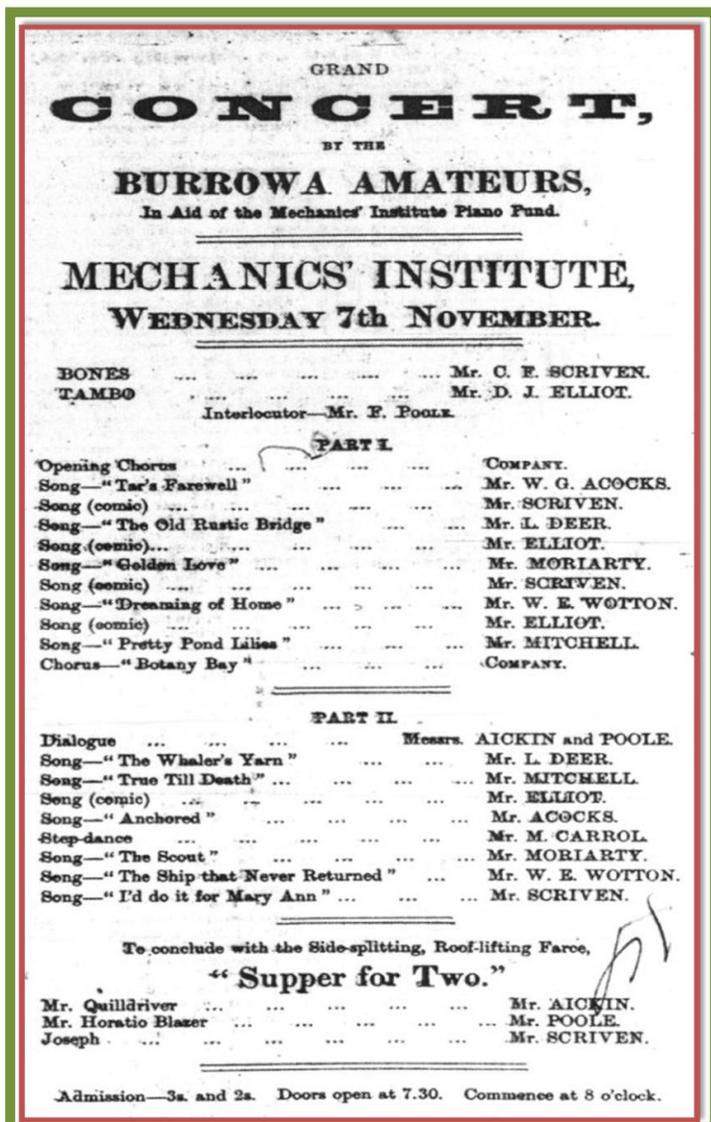
Silent movies were first seen in Boorowa in July 1900 when ‘Lantern Entertainment’ was shown at the Mechanics’ Institute with scenes of the Boer War.

In May 1901, AB ‘Banjo’ Patterson used the Hall of the Institute to deliver a speech on his political principles.

The building was used as a Picture Theatre, for concerts, balls, dances, dramatic performances, especially by Dramatic Societies, skating, fetes, bazaars, brass band practice, private tuition, and political speeches.

Fundraising for the Institute was constant throughout the years, including a specific period when the aim was to buy a piano to support many of the other activities.

Some of the sources of income included



\* A Mrs Mahony lodged a tender for use of the Supper Room when the Institute was used as a Picture Theatre.

\* Miss Estelle de Boshier applied for use of the Hall for two hours each Monday evening for three months for private tuition, offering to pay fifteen shillings for each evening.

\* Mr H Dunn, secretary of the Burrowa Town Band applied to rent the Supper Room for the band to practise in for 2/6 each evening and a small room for Committee meetings at the same price. The band was not to practice if the Hall was otherwise engaged.

*The Burrowa News*

**Friday 2 November 1888** (left)

and

**Friday 13 November 1925** (below)



**GOOD NEWS!**

---

**Annual - Church - Fete,**  
Mechanics' Hall and Grounds, December 4th, 5th & 7th.

---

The Grounds will be transformed into Fairyland, adorned with  
Trees and Brilliantly Illuminated.

---

**AN AMUSING FARCE**

In the Hall. Also, Dances and Other Entertainments. In the Open Air.  
**Maypole Dances and other items.**

The Boorowa Band will play selections—An Excellent Orchestra for Dancing.

You will be able to buy—At the Fancy Stall your Christmas Presents. At the Sweet Stall Home-Made  
Sweets and Lucky Bags. All you want for Sunday's Dinner at the Produce Stall.  
At the Toy Stall—Christmas Presents for the Children. All kinds of Toys for Girls and Boys.  
A Pleasant Surprise Packet at the Packet Stall. Pot Plants and Flowers at the Flower Stall.  
The Wisteria Cafe announces Refreshments and Cool Drinks. Ice Cream. Children specially Catered for  
at reduced Prices.

*For Country Visitors and Others* an Excellent Tea will be provided at Reasonable Cost.

The Toy Stall announces an attractive Hoopla. Saturday Afternoon, Special Attractions for the Children.  
A well-stocked Christmas Tree, and Father Christmas will talk to the Children.

**Don't Forget Monday Night:**  
the result of the Baby Competition will be announced.  
The Committee will do all in its power to make the Fete an enjoyable time for all.

- 7 March 1884:** A Grand Dramatic and Ethiopian Entertainment by the Burrowa Amateur Dramatic Club  
*Birds in a Fix* Tickets 3/- and 2/-.
- 14 March 1884 :** Quadrille Party : Under the management of St Patrick's Branch of AHC Guild Burrowa  
Dancing to commence at 8.30 pm Double tickets 6/- Single tickets 4/-
- 27 February 1885:** A Musical Drama *Robinson Crusoe* which will be rendered by juveniles for the benefit  
of the Piano Fund. Admission 2/- and 1/6 Children 1/-
- 20 July 1888 :** Irish Drama *Ould Ireland*  
to be performed by Mr Charles Taylor's Company "The Called Back Company"  
with Irish scenery painted by Mr John Henning sot the Theatre Royal Sydney
- 13 September 1888 :** A lecture on *Wheat Soils, Wheat Farming, Diseases etc*  
by Mr Angus Mackay of the Technical College Sydney.

### References:

*Boorowa: Over 160 Years of White Settlement* by Helen V. Lloyd Toveloom Panania NSW 1990  
Trove National Library of Australia. Digitised Newspapers: *The Burrowa News*  
Wikipedia

**Research:** Jan Conoplia (Member ADFAS Canberra)

**Photos:** Jan Conoplia