



# BRAIDWOOD NSW



**Name: The Literary Institute.**

**Address: Wallace St Braidwood NSW** opposite Ryrie Park.

## **The Town:**

Braidwood is a rural town situated in the Southern Tablelands halfway between Canberra and the coast at Batemans Bay.

White men first came to the area in 1822: surveyors Hoddle, Harper, Knapp and Ogilvie. The area of Braidwood was explored by Kearns, Marsh and Packer in 1825. Grants were issued in 1828 to William and James Ryrie at “Arnprior” which was a staging post before the town. Others took up grants in 1827 and 1828 such as Duncan Mackellar at “Jinglemoney” and “Jingamona”; Major Elrington at “Mt Elrington”; George Bunn at “St Omer” William Roberts at “Exeter Farm” Jembaicumbene. In 1827 Captain John Coghill bought a grant of land south of Wilson’s Braidwood farm, while he was in partnership with John Oxley at Kirkham at Camden, which he managed until Oxley’s death in 1828. Coghill bought “Strathallan” from Duncan Mackellar in 1836 and resided there while he was building “Bedervale”. The surveyed plan of the town was altered to its present design in 1839 by James Larmer from his surveyors’ tent, to include a recreation area around the courthouse, with fortunately wide streets on the instructions from Governor Darling. Larmer settled in



Braidwood and built the Royal hotel, later a building for the Grand United Order of Oddfellows, another benevolent society, and now Braidwood and District Historical Museum. Next door there was a Mechanics' Institute building now joined to the Hotel. Larmer is buried in the Braidwood Historic Cemetery at the southern end of town.

The first sale of allotments was in 1840. In 1825 by government decree, one seventh of the total county had to be designated for the Church and School estate. The first school was opened in 1849.

Braidwood became a prosperous area when gold was discovered in the district in the 1850's and the population swelled to approximately ten thousand with gold prospectors, many of whom were Chinese. The town has maintained a population of around 1200 people since then with a further 1200 in the district. The drought of 1837-39 was a disastrous blow to graziers resulting in the closing of the doors of the Bank of Australia in 1843 causing a financial crisis in Braidwood until 1845 and a consequent decrease from the 1841 census with a population of 1500, to just 1100. The population at "Bedervale" and "Strathallan" was then 78.

When sheep became unsaleable and there was no refrigeration, Henry O'Brian from Yass had a solution by boiling down sheep for tallow for candles and soap and feeding the residue to pigs. "Bedervale" built a boiling down building on the creek. Other droughts further eroded Braidwood's rural prosperity. Up to 1970 there were few shops operating. With the lack of a train service, the nearest being at Tarago, and a gravel road connection to the nearest city, Goulburn, the town of Braidwood gradually became an isolated area. This in effect was its saviour, the saving of its main street facades intact, and in March 2006 it became famous as the first complete town to be put on the New South Wales State Heritage register. Braidwood is now a flourishing centre with a strong rural population. Ten years of drought ended with the rains of 2012. Braidwood has always been and is still, a premier place for breeding quality cattle, horses and sheep. Cattle sales are held regularly at the Braidwood Saleyards. The early days of dairies and cheese factories, rabbit freezing works, and a tannery, have gone but there still exists a small forestry industry and a local timber mill. An excellent local show is held annually as well as race meetings and other horse events. A gold mine close by at Majors Creek has recently been approved.

The town's prosperity is due to the tourist trade and it is the halfway stop for Canberrans travelling to the coast. All the shops in the main street are now occupied to service this trade; a great advantage to the locals. The population has been fortified with semi-retirement groups who can work from home or commute to Canberra, as well as artists, actors, writers and crafts people, and historians.



**Left: Commemorative jug 1920;  
showing the Institute building.**



Among the major buildings that are part of the Victorian/ Edwardian streetscape is the Literary Institute, built in 1869 with additions and renovations in 1891. Part of the building was used by local government in 1936. In 1958 the building was formally resumed from the trustees by Tallaganda Shire Council.

### **The Beginning: 1858**

In October 1857, a letter was sent from seventeen of the town's most prominent men to the local police magistrate, Mr. William Essington King, requesting a public meeting to establish a Subscription Library sponsored by people of authority and the Government. Sometime later, eight subscribers were registered and the Institute was inaugurated at the Doncaster Hotel on 4<sup>th</sup> February 1858. The fee was one guinea membership per annum. The purpose was "to elevate the tone of Moral and Intellectual attainment in the minds of all members of the community" and was addressed to people "of his adopted or native land" but it was probably above the finances of most. While negotiating for a suitable site, various premises were rented for the lending library: a building at the rear of the commercial hotel; the beehive store 6 shillings per week; a slab building at the rear of the Court Houses; the Victoria stores in Mackellar street for 10 shillings per week; the building adjacent to the post office on the corner of Mackellar and Wallace streets; until finally in 1869, with local donations matching the state government funding of 100 pounds, the building was erected on the current site granted next to the new telegraph office and opposite the park. A provisional committee of eighteen was elected to frame rules and regulations for the establishment. There were many ups and downs in the management in the early days; and at one time the lending service was suspended. One member was suspended for "gross behaviour when the worse for liquor". Another apologised for discourteous behaviour. There was keen competition for committee positions although they deplored the preference by subscribers for fiction rather than moral and intellectual works.

**Right:**

**Minute Book, from 1900**

**Visitors' Book**

**Library Register**

**Borrowing Book for long term and day Loans.**

These archival records are held in the collection of the Braidwood and District Historical Society.





## The Building: 1869

Funds in hand were £107.13.0 and a lottery bazaar raised just over £502 pounds: prizes for the lottery were a Buggy; Buggy Harness; a gold watch; a sewing machine; and a purse with five sovereigns. With these funds available, the government grant was received and a grant made of land in Wallace St next to the telegraph office. Trustees Bunn, Larmer and Gilham were appointed.

**Right:**

**Building of the Braidwood  
Literary Institute nearing  
completion.**

Photo: National Library of Australia



Cost of the new building was set at £1400. A quote from Richard Hannaford was tendered for £1280. One hundred and fifty thousand bricks were ordered at a cost of 30/- per thousand, with cartage of £36. Cesspool and water closets were constructed. Costs amounted to £2050.14.7 leaving a debt of £400. Several gentlemen made promissory notes of £50 in order to secure a bank loan.

The foundation stone was laid June 25 1869. In 1891 an addition was made on the north side where an additional 15 feet of land had been bought and a plan drawn by Architect Blackett for the builder Isley. The Municipal Council rented the extra rooms.

## Uses:

Donations of books from private libraries were received. Books were purchased from booksellers in Australia and London and subscriptions were made to various newspapers but not the popular Roman Catholic paper "The Freemans Journal". Saint Bede's had its own library and there were also lending libraries at Araluen and Jembaicumbene. Intellectual lectures were held in the building; a debating class was started and two chess sets were purchased.

In 1862 there were approx 400 books. By 1873 there were 102 members and 2859 books: 1000 serious works of history, biography, poetry, drama and travel; and 1800 popular fiction which were most in demand.



**Left:**

**Books from the  
Braidwood Literary  
Institute.**

Collection of the  
Braidwood and  
District Historical  
Society

The Literary Institute and Reading Room was well patronised. In 1907 seven thousand books were issued, mostly fiction, some travel and history, an average of one book per member per week. Papers in the Reading Room were the “Lone Hand”, “Sporting and Dramatic News”, “Graphic”, and “The Illustrated London News”. Serialised romantic fiction in the local newspaper, *The Braidwood Review and District Advocate*, provided reading for those unable to join the Literary Institute. Later there was also another paper *The Braidwood Dispatch*.

Church services were a regular community event and the Church organised fancy dress parades, flower shows etc. and as well, wakes were held in the hall. Religious disputes arose and there was need for a decision on whether the Institute should be open on Sundays.

Choral classes were organised and a Mutual Improvement Society was formed, a source of much pleasure instruction and usefulness well attended in the winter. In an era of typical country entertainment - processions for festivals, celebrations, and picnics - the Institute was used for dances and concerts and balls after these events.

Even though women were granted the vote in 1894, ladies were admitted only as associated members and they were not allowed in the Reading Room. They paid half subscription and were only allowed to borrow one book at a time. Some men used their wife’s membership so this had to be reviewed. To reduce running costs a female librarian was employed at £36 per annum.

The hall was rented out to town clubs. During the 1914-18 war the hall was free for patriotic purposes.

The Literary Institute committee held a Jubilee Ball. A lecture was given by Terrence Murray of Yarralumla (Member of the Legislative Council and on the Institute Board) on *Ballad Poetry of England Scotland and Ireland*.

Debating classes were held and two chess sets purchased. A Lipp semi grand piano, insured for 100 pounds, was purchased “to be used only by competent musicians.” In 1905 Mr Austin Chapman, member for Federal Parliament and President of the Institute, said it was the showplace of the district and no other town of similar population could compare with Braidwood: the building, the library and its equipment. In 1908 two billiard tables were

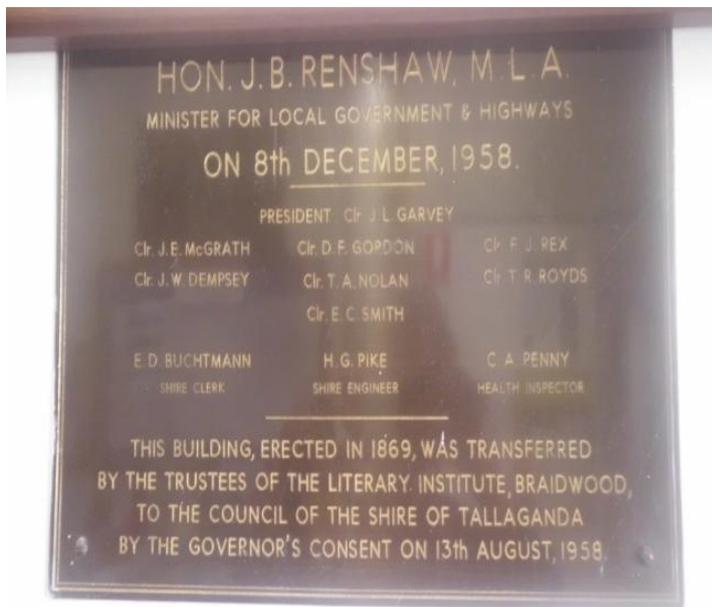


installed in the Reading Room to encourage more members, although drinking was not permitted. These tables were moved to the Braidwood Servicemen's Club in 1954.

The building was most popular in 1913 when used by Mr D Graham and Mr Paul Nomchong to show moving pictures before they were moved to the National Theatre building down the street in 1926. When the electric generator was installed Mr. Nomchong had to be admonished for flashing search lights into the street. The hall was used for roller skating until 1880.

The north side was used by Farmers and Graziers stock and station agents, later by council engineers. In 1936 Tallaganda Shire rented the premises.

In 1958 the directors of the Literary Institute passed the building over to the State Government due to its decline in use.



Apart from the library, there were the two large marble top billiard tables and a semi grand piano. Farmers and Graziers stock and station agents occupied part of the building and Tallaganda Shire moved its offices to the building in 1958, one hundred years after the inauguration of the Literary Institute. Many local functions, such as fancy dress parades and flower shows continued to be held in the large hall upstairs until it too was turned into offices for the Shire.

**Above: Plaque commemorating the transfer of the Institute building from the Trustees to the Council of the Tallaganda Shire. 1958.**

Some books from the Institute library were transferred to the Braidwood and District Historical Museum and also one large paper-reading stand. Some stamped Literary Institute newspapers are also held at the Museum.

**Right:**

**Library Stamp on newspaper:**

*Braidwood Literary Institute.*

*Established 1858*

Collection of Braidwood and District Historical Society.





The library remained in the building on the south side until 1989 when it was transferred to a new building in the laneway. An up to date library with technical facilities, including computer internet access, was built at the rear of the original building.

Today, education in Braidwood is available to all through to the Higher School Certificate at the school; colleges and universities are located at Goulburn and Canberra just one hour away. There is access to television and radio, even a local radio station for students to become presenters, and community financial help for students travelling or completing courses away. Braidwood has always had a local newspaper, currently *The Braidwood Times*.

### **Currently: 2012**

The building is used at present by the council staff until they move to the laneway old library building; and by Westpac bank agency after they closed the old Bank of NSW premises next door.

When in 2011 Palerang Council proposed moving their offices to Bungendore, a Braidwood Literary Institute (BLI) group was instigated by local residents to save the building for the community. This group produces evenings of *Eclectia*, provided by talented local residents to raise funds for the building; and a grant has been received from State Government for its restoration. Painting and repair of the exterior are now in progress.

Palerang Council has stated that the building will soon be available for use as Braidwood Community Centre and has recommended that a committee under the Palerang Council be established to manage and maintain the building on behalf of the Braidwood community. A survey has been produced by the BLI committee to ascertain community interest. The current research and lending library with internet access will remain at the rear of the original building.

### **Acknowledgements:**

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National Library Photos.

Braidwood and District Historical Society.

Palerang Council and Library

Cheryl Jackson

Sue Murray

**Photographs:** Margaret Royds OAM



**References:**

Braidwood and District Historical Society holds a collection of Literary Institute records, together with books from the former library of the Institute, and a notice board. They are located at the Braidwood Museum.

*Hidden History* Dr Christine Wright 1996

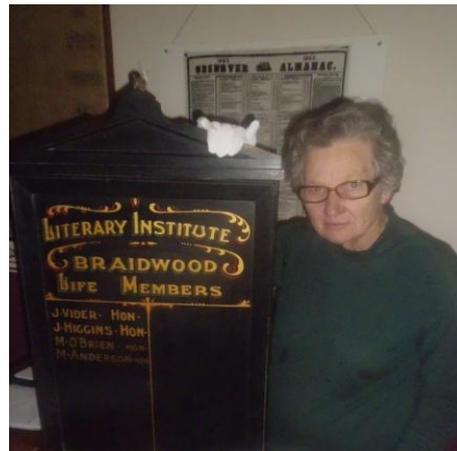
*Braidwood Heritage* Netta Ellis 1983

*Braidwood Dear Braidwood* Netta Ellis 1989

Staff paper by Andrew Sergeant, Reference Librarian, National Library of Australia 2009

**Compiled** by Margaret Royds OAM

**Margaret pictured researching at the Institute, with board commemorating Life Members of the Braidwood Literary Institute.**



**ADFAS Canberra**

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