



## HISTORY OF MERRIWA

Merriwa District was first known as Gummun (or small) Plains.

Distribution of land to white settlers in the Gummun District commenced in about 1830, but as early as 1824 white settlers were moving into the area from the west as well as from the Lower Hunter. Early settlers included John Blaxland, a member of the Legislative Council AL Mackenzie, Charles Blaxland (Cullingral), WC Wentworth, JB Bettington (Brindley Park also a MLC and a director of the Bank of NSW 1828-1850), George Hall (Gundibri), Henry Dutton (Terragong).

In the early days, sheep raising for wool was the principle rural industry.

Design for a village to serve the district was presented to the Executive Council on 26 December, 1839 and was gazetted on 22 January, 1840. At the time village land prices were eight pounds per acre. Merriwa, it is claimed, has three main meanings:- Flour made from grass seeds by rubbing them between stones.

Settlement of the Cassilis district commenced at about the same time, early settlers being Donald McIntyre (Dalkeith), Thomas Arnold (Llangolen), Alexander Busby (Cassilis Station), George Clive and EWT Hamilton (Collaroy Station).

Merriwa Post Office was established on 1 January, 1845. Mail arrived two or three times a week from Merton by a two horse mail cart. Cassilis mail was carried on from Merriwa on horseback.

Dr Michael Macartney practised in the district after 1840 and was the district's first fully qualified medical practitioner and surgeon. Macartney Street, Merriwa was named in his memory.

Rector AR George Boodle of the Parish of Muswellbrook began church life in the district. Construction of the first church commenced in 1850 and was consecrated in 1855 as "Holy Trinity" by William Tyrell, Lord Bishop of Newcastle. Rev William Skinner Wilson was rector from 1862 to 1883. The present sandstone Church was completed in 1900, the same year as the church of St Columba at Cassilis was erected.

A private school opened in 1840 with an enrolment of 21 children. A national school was opened in March, 1850 at the western end of Mackenzie Street, Merriwa. It was one of the earliest in NSW. In 1858 Merriwa had three "respectable inns", 5 stores and 2 blacksmiths.

A court house was built in November 1858 and a wooden Catholic Church was completed at about the same time, opposite the present Post Office.

In 1866 the population was 200. Cassilis in 1861 had a population of 70 to 80, and a Post Office, Police Station and three hotels by 1866. As Cassilis is one of the lower points on the Great Dividing Range the traffic route through Merriwa from the west was extensively used until the railway was built over the Blue Mountains. Many dwellers in Merriwa were therefore carriers. Many "selectores" took up selections in the district between 1861 and 1890, including I Noble (Hampshire), J Lennox (Summer Hill), J O'Brien (Green Arm), J Lawler (Tara Hall), W Nixon (High Park), C McRae (Mountain Station), E Potts (Aln-dale) and P Tracey of Dry Gully.

Bishop Torregiano opened St Anne's sandstone Catholic Church in June. The first Priest in the Parish was Fr T Meagher (1874-1878). In 1885 the first convent school opened with 76 enrolments. Fr O'Reilly was Parish Priest from 1885 to 1922.

The first hospital was established in 1906, the first Shire President being ME Maher. Councillor BF Hegarty MBE was President of the Shire from 1950 to 1976 inclusive. The "Australian Joint Stock Bank" opened in October, 1888 in the "Old Stone Cottage", Bettington Street and the first account was the "Merriwa Cricket Club". The bank collapsed a few years later.

Horse racing was very popular in the 1890's . Races were held at Brindley Park course and also at Bow, Wybong, Denman and Borambil. Cricket was also very popular and athletics clubs flourished.

The "Merriwa and Cassilis Standard" was first published in 1895 and was available each Saturday at three pence per copy.

The two main hotels in Merriwa were the Fitzroy, erected in 1892 (James Ell, proprietor), and the "Cricketers Arms" (WJ Gallagher, proprietor). The big sheds would employ 40 to 50 shearers and shed hands, and up to 100,000 sheep were put through the one shed. At the turn of the century a satisfactory price for wool was between 6d and 10d a pound.

Merriwa folklore tells of evil deeds of several bushrangers and outlaws including Joe and Jimmy Governor and Jacky Underwood who murdered five people and wounded several others. An aboriginal "Black Harry" was alleged to have murdered a child at Gundibri and hence "murdering Hut Gully" 9 miles east of Merriwa, on the Scone Road, was named. Much of the foregoing was obtained from information provided by Mrs Helen Bettington of "Terragong", who produced "The Lure of the Land", first published in 1974. Copies of the book may be purchased from or through the [Merriwa Historical Society](#).

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