

# TIMELINES

The Quarterly Newsletter of Murwillumbah Historical Society Inc.

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## Welcome

Welcome to the July 2019 edition of *Timelines*, the newsletter of the Murwillumbah Historical Society. We are pleased to present an informative and entertaining mix of features in this edition, with a major focus on medical and public health issues.

Maris Bruzgulis concludes his compelling account of the impact of the 1919 Spanish 'Flu in the Tweed. The Society extends a hearty well-done to Maris for the publication of his article by the Royal Australian Historical Society.

Ken Forster, who has had a life-long association with public-health administration in Murwillumbah and the wider Tweed, provides his perspective on the current controversy around vaccination and immunisation.

Di Millar adds personal, local, national and international perspectives on the distressing impact of poliomyelitis.

This edition's contents are:

- The 1919 Influenza Pandemic on the Tweed (Part II) - Maris Bruzgulis.
- Vaccination: a personal perspective - Ken Forster,
- Poliomyelitis: a dark time in our history - Di Millar
- Changing Visual Representations of Wollumbin/Mt Warning - Phil Strickland.

## The 1919 Influenza Pandemic

*Maris Bruzgulis concludes his chronicle of how the Influenza Pandemic impacted on the Tweed, with a focus on how the district responded to it.*

The death toll caused by the influenza pandemic of 1918-19 was certainly one of its most significant and tragic features – between 15 to 100 million people are estimated to have succumbed worldwide. To place this toll in context, estimates of the civilian and military death toll in World War I range from between 15 and 19 million.

In Australia, the official estimate was 11,552 deaths from influenza and pneumonic influenza, with almost half of these -5,783 deaths - in New South Wales. However, the NSW statistician estimated the State's death toll as 6,387 from influenza, pneumonic influenza, and influenza and pneumonia. Between 225 and 229 people died in the North Coast Division of the State.

The pneumonic influenza pandemic reached its height in Australia in June-July 1919. The *Tweed Daily* reported on Friday 27 June that the Municipal Medical Officer of Health “thought the progress of the epidemic was easily [*sic*: easing] slightly [in the Tweed], although the virulence of the disease was increasing”. It was a matter of concern that the three deaths on the preceding



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If you have come into possession of any old family or historic photos, please lend them to us to copy! Please contact the museum on (02) 6670 2493 by email at [trm@tweed.nsw.gov.au](mailto:trm@tweed.nsw.gov.au)

Thursday brought “the total deaths up to thirteen”.

However, the focus on deaths has possibly obscured other aspects of the pandemic. The *Tweed Daily* also noted that on 25 June the Municipal Medical Officer of Health had seen “120 cases between Cudgen and North Arm, not including the hospitals at Murwillumbah.” This underlines how the impacts of the pandemic were not confined to deaths. People fell ill, were incapacitated, required nursing, recovered, and then needed to recuperate. All these stages magnified the impact of the pandemic.

The following article from the *Tweed Daily* on 27 June - ‘The coat men’ – provides an insight into the lived experience of the pandemic. For modern readers it also identifies several characteristics of the pandemic. First and foremost of these were the “[s]igns and symptoms (fever, muscle aches, respiratory complaints ) that have remained constant over centuries. Secondly, the unprecedented age-specific mortality (and case fatality) pattern, in which young infected adults were at extraordinarily high risk, a feature not seen before or since”. Thirdly, the “determinants of influenza spread [which] obviously include crowding and human movement”. Finally, the grim twist “that virtually all 1918 influenza deaths were due not to influenza itself but to complicating secondary bacterial Broncho-pneumonias”.

The Coat Men article sets out approaches to confronting the influenza pandemic that have subsequently been confirmed sound: “families, schools, and remote locales often successfully isolated themselves to prevent infection”, and “the single variable most associated with influenza survival was good nursing care, including care provided in the home”. The overriding element conveyed by the article, however, is the stoic humour, the rueful smile that accompanied events of overwhelming sadness and potential loss.

### **THE COAT MEN - “HAVE YOU HAD IT?”**

The password in the street and on the roads today is: “Have you had it?”

The reply is generally “Yes,” with a wan smile that in itself tells the tale of the 'flu. It is easier now to count the population that has not had the 'flu than those who have; convalescents are to be seen everywhere. You can pick them out at a

mere glance as you pass down the street. First of all, they mostly have a big overcoat, which is worn throughout the day. They don't walk—they just move along with slow and unmeasured step and as they come closer you perceive a pale and sickly face. It is the 'flu alright.

You inquire. “Oh, I only had a mild attack,” comes the reply, and then “But it was good enough for me.” They all start to tell you how weak they feel; no appetite for work. The only appetite they have is to wander aimlessly about, or sit down in some snug corner with a big coat on and in the warm sunshine.

Of his sickness everyman has a different tale to tell. It is a peculiarity of the disease. Very few men are affected alike.

“I had an awful head,” relates one.

“The pains in my back got me worse” says someone else. And the burden of another man's tale is his experience with vomiting. And so they go on. Somehow it seems the pride of everyone just recovered to give glowing accounts of what they experienced, how they felt it first, what happened next, how many people got it in the same house together, who got it first; how long they were in bed—and a dozen and one little particulars that usually would be of no interest. The stories, too, generally fall on willing ears. No one is ever tired of talking and listening about, 'flu.

There are mild cases, medium cases and serious cases, and there are also fatal cases, but never listen to the man who only thinks he has had it. There is never any doubt about the matter, for there is one universal aftermath and that is weakness. The mildest attacks, results in a weakness that puts to rest any doubt as to whether a person has “had it”. A Murwillumbah medico declared that it really requires a fortnight's holiday in every instance to restore 'flu patients to anything like their former strength. And a huge chorus of assent in this opinion goes up from the army of convalescents.

Preventatives and restrictions as a whole have long since fallen into disgrace. As each day goes by one hears that some fresh person who had been taking the most elaborate precautions had “gone down.” It appears that nothing really holds back the march of the 'flu germ. If a person is susceptible to the disease he might well save time and expense in following up preventive treatment. His best plan is to look cheerful and when he gets the disease take every precaution and go on being cheerful until he recovers.

These are really days to be remembered for a long time to come; days to be remembered almost like those of the war. There is a personal contact about the 'flu that brings the epidemic home much more forcibly than the war. Those who have had the misfortune to lose dear ones have in truth something to remember the epidemic by—but everyone more or less will have a remembrance of kindly treatment received from unsuspected quarters—of invaluable help received from neighbours and strangers alike that compels one to think that after all the world and its people have not grown so cold as they seemed to be. There is a warmth about human kindness which the 'flu has caused hundreds of people in this district to feel and appreciate as they have never done in their lives before.

“Have, you, had it yet?” No—then you possibly have yet to come into the pleasant glow of this warmth and comradeship which is the child of adversity.

Given this experience, historians have asked why the pandemic has not been imprinted more strongly on our historical memory. The Coat Men article creates the expectation that its memory will be akin to (though of course not the equal of) that of the war just passed. Fatal illnesses fell disproportionately on men between 25 to 40 years old - and this perhaps helps explain the article's gendered nature. However, the brunt of the labour of caring for the sick fell on the women of the community. (Among women, the highest death rate occurred in the age group 65 and over). While the writer basks in “the pleasant glow of this warmth

and comradeship which is the child of adversity”, he hides the challenges that had to be navigated to arrive at such a state. It is perhaps these differences of opinion that provide some insight into the absence of a formal public memorialization of the pandemic and the losses that it caused in 1919.



*Dr Joseph Albert Goldsmid (1869-1955). During the influenza pandemic he was the district's Government Medical Officer, but also referred to as the Health Officer for the Murwillumbah Municipal Council and the Municipal Medical Officer for Health. His observation about pneumonic influenza included in the official report on the epidemiology and administration: 'Relapses not uncommon. Early treatment, especially bed, usually followed by mild attack.'*

*[New South Wales State Archives and Records. Digital ID: NRS9873\_2\_719\_[242].]*

The closing of the New South Wales and Queensland border to facilitate quarantine has been described extensively. While not as notable, the preparations for an emergency hospital in Murwillumbah and the need for the help of volunteers as the pandemic spread also became matters that fostered differences of opinion.

After the declaration of New South Wales as a 'Quarantine Area' on 27 January 1919, the Colonial Sugar Refining Company's manager, Mr Wray, offered his organization's assistance to the communities of the Tweed Valley through, among other things, "the use of 50 tents if necessary" as emergency accommodation for influenza cases. But where were they to be used?

Dr Goldsmid said that the medical committee considered that "in the case of an epidemic the [Tweed] District Hospital be transferred to the Public School, and the hospital building used purely for influenza cases alone, for which it would be much more suitable than any other building available". However, the Hospital Matron pointed out that "it would be practically impossible to shift the District Hospital to the Public School, and use the former for the influenza epidemic".

The Hospital Committee therefore suggested "that the Pavilion on the Showground be placed in readiness for any emergency". The Pavilion presented its own problems "for the following reasons:—(1) It is a big, draughty barn, situated on low-lying ground, and if wet weather should set in, is as unfit for nursing pneumonia as any place could be; (2) There is no suitable accommodation for the nurses as regards either eating or sleeping—they cannot eat and sleep in the pavilion where cases are being nursed; (3) The position of the latrines is bad, being separated from the pavilion by low-lying ground, which becomes swamped in wet weather".

These various proposals led to the decision that the "first suspected case of pneumonic influenza in Murwillumbah will be sent to the Tweed District Hospital, where they will be lodged either in the isolation block or in tents, to be erected immediately in the grounds [and] other accommodation, if needed, is to be left in abeyance until the first case occurs, but the Public School will probably be the place used". In the event, four months passed before there was a need to finally establish the Murwillumbah emergency hospital on 16 June 1919.

The hospital was situated "in the old school buildings overlooking the main street, which will be staffed by Salvation Army V[oluntary] A[ssistance] D[etachment]s under the supervision of a trained nurse". Even then, the emergency hospital was a bone of contention.

Dr J. S. S. McEvoy wrote two days later (18 June 1919) that the "old school is at present occupied by about 11 males in one room, sleeping neck to neck in a vile atmosphere, but at the same time pervaded by draught and lighted by one hurricane lamp". Dr Goldsmid's response to what he considered a "slur on himself and the Salvation Army" was to ask the meeting of the Influenza Administrative Committee for an "expression of confidence" which was duly given (after the departure of Dr McEvoy) in the form of a motion that "in connection with the emergency hospital Dr. Goldsmid had done his best in the circumstances". The emergency hospital was closed on 16 July.

A second major difference of opinion arose after the outbreak of pneumonic influenza at Tyalgum. The Literary Institute held a 'Plain and Fancy Dress Ball' on 7 May. In spite of inclement weather it was attended by an estimated 75 couples. Apparently "reports of bad roads, bogged cars, and other minor accidents were common, but the sufferers did not let such trifles interfere with the evening's enjoyment", and a "welcome break for supper was made about midnight, after which dancing continued merrily till 3.30 a.m." – people took their enjoyment where they could find it.

The Tyalgum report ended with a note that a "slight epidemic of influenza prevails at present, and several residents are suffering from colds". On 12 May the *Tweed Daily* reported that "four fresh cases of influenza were admitted to the Tweed District Hospital since Saturday night from the Shire area [including] one from Tyalgum". By 12 May "influenza was raging at Tyalgum". It was "looked on as the most virulent centre in the district so far as influenza was concerned" and "medical men had traced 10 cases from

Tyalgum since Saturday; the patients from New Brighton had attended a dance at Tyalgum, and it was evident that it was at that place they had contracted the disease”.



*Dr Theodore William Van Epen (1880-1940). During the influenza pandemic he was Acting Health Officer for the Tweed Shire Council during May 1919.*

*[New South Wales State Archives and Records. Digital ID: NRS9873\_2\_750\_R3259.]*

At the same time the Tweed District Hospital Committee found its resources being stretched by the illness: “Owing to the difficulty of securing a housemaid and other domestic help at the Tweed District Hospital, bringing about a position of affairs more unsatisfactory than usual because of the crowded state of the institution at present, the committee are seeking the aid of members of the local V.A.D. to help them through, and by advertisement to-day request that volunteers from the corps in question will offer for this work as early as possible. Will those ladies who can possibly give some assistance place their names with the hospital secretary”.

It was in these circumstances that the Acting Shire

Medical Officer, Dr T Van Epen, visited Tyalgum on 13 May and again on the 16th. Briefing the Tweed Shire Council on 22 May he was quoted as saying: “I regret to report that the appeal for help from V.A.D. members and others willing to assist fell on deaf ears. When we are fighting an enemy as ruthless in its death dealing as pneumonic influenza, and with a list of casualties second to no war record, it was certainly expected that some of those white-robed paraders in the recent patriotic procession would have volunteered their services for the benefit of their fellow citizens in distress, and as a proof that their patriotic protestations were beyond dispute”. These words were the cause of the storm that followed – which ceased only when a natural storm descended on the Tweed.



*A group portrait of the Duranbah Red Cross. This photo appears to have been taken during the ‘blind soldier poet’ Signaler Tom Skeyhill’s Gallipoli war lecture tour in 1917. It was inscribed: ‘Signaler Skeyhill, who lectures on the war in Murwillumbah on 27th inst., will address a special meeting of Red Cross ladies at 3 p.m., in the supper room.’ [Tweed Regional Museum, Photograph; Unknown; 1914-1918; M13-6.]*

Dr Van Epen’s ill-chosen words ‘white-robed paraders’ were taken some to refer to members of the Red Cross. However, van Epen denied this.

W. G. Jay was the first into the fray: “Personally, I must protest against the utterly uncalled for aspersion made upon our patriotic societies. For four years these women, the pick of Murwillumbah, have worked in season and out of season”. He concluded: “I think Dr. Van Epen would be much better advised if he called on those ladies who have hitherto not taken any part in war

work, more particularly on those who have no pressing domestic duties. He would not have very far to go”.

Jay was followed by ‘Justice’, who asked the Tweed Daily’s Editor to “be good enough, per medium of your paper, to enter a protest on behalf of the V.A.D. members against the unjustified, and scathing attack made against them by the Acting Shire Medical Officer of Health in his report to the Council concerning the shortage of nursing applicants at the Hospital”. ‘Justice’ for his part raised the heat of the argument by suggesting that the lack of volunteers may have been excused by “the lack of example shown by many of our married ladies (and leading ladies at that), whose presence at the Hospital for nursing purposes might have been expected by reason of the fact that they have neither ‘chick’ nor ‘child’ to consider”.

Dr Van Epen defended himself two days later: “No-one is more grateful to the Red Cross and kindred societies than I am, for the splendid work they have done for our forces abroad.” He also responded to ‘Justice’: “In reference to the other letter in which a personal attack is made on me by an individual under the nom-de-plume of ‘Justice’ - thus showing his distorted conception of this word -I refuse to comment on same until he declares his true identity, when I doubt not I shall be justified in prescribing a similar course of treatment for him as that set forth in my shire report”.

The next day ‘Red Cross Husband’ joined the lists - “Who does Dr. Van Epen refer to? ‘[Is it] those white-robed paraders in the recent patriotic procession’ as mentioned in his report to the Shire Council, or the V.A. Detachment - a body quite distinct from the Red Cross and War Chest Societies, *vide* his letter to your paper yesterday, in which he admits there is no such detachment in this town.’ Jay and ‘Justice’ echoed this letter, with the latter upset on at least three counts.

First, because of the “indignation existing amongst the ladies attacked and their friends” on account of Van Epen’s statement; second in his belief that “Dr. Van Epen intended his remarks for the benefit of all the ladies who on Anzac Day marched in the procession, and he has yet to satisfactorily explain how, in his opinion, the latter have earned the title of White Robed Paraders”; and third on his own account because in Van Epen’s “desire to prescribe for me a

similar course of treatment as that set forth in his Shire report, I can hardly, credit that he would be so vindictive or callously brutal to do so.”

S. F. Wilson, the Secretary of the Tyalgum Influenza Committee, sprung to Van Epen’s defence and made a “very decided protest against Mr. Jay’s letter”, as well as pointing out the demands made on those who had volunteered: “Mrs. Stewart, who has a large family and many ties, volunteered, and is still doing the cooking for the Tweed Shire Emergency Hospital at Tyalgum, and also Miss Joyce, who is in a salaried position, finds time after her office work to give valuable assistance.”

‘Blue Jay’ of Tyalgum drew a line under this whole matter on 30 May: “May an ordinary cross husband (not Red Cross) heave a brick into the V.A.D. glass house per medium of your journal?” His characterisation of the Van Epen’s critics bears repeating: “As to Will Gee Jay’s indignant effusion [, it] appears to me to be a merely feeble clutching for a cheap advertisement, and as ‘Justice’ is akin to a dancing Dervish who whirls and whirls his body until worked into a frenzy, there isn’t any necessity to devote any time to a review of their contributions”.

Blue Jay’s view of Van Epen’s request for help is, among other things, also indicative of the damage done to the community’s social fabric by the war:

“During the war, in Murwillumbah as in other places, there were many single women (‘white robed paraders’ in a large number of instances), who, on the one hand, were wont to sneer, and rightly so, perhaps, at males eligible for service and without encumbrances who failed to respond to the call of Empire, and, on the other, girls and women who sought to excuse a shirker brother or son, equally eligible and equally free of domestic or civic obligations. Many there were of both classes who did little more than that suggested, yet when the time comes, they being without encumbrances and obligations and certainly eligible for the work, failed to respond to a call that had quite as strong an appeal as the defence of the Flag had to the sterner male species.

These, I think, must have been the people Dr. Van Epen referred to, and when it is recalled that there appeared to be an urgent need for help at the time, and no volunteers coming forward, it is hard to see why W.G.J. should ruffle his feathers and strut bantam-like through your columns, a Red Cross chip on his shoulder and War Chest abnormally expanded, in pretended indignation at a well-merited caustic reference to young ladies who certainly laid themselves open to it. A few friends may tell W.G.J. and 'Justice' (probably they are one) that they did the right thing in taking up the cudgels as they have done, but most of those whom I have heard express themselves since reading Dr. Van Epen's letter (and I might say I do not know that gentleman personally) are of the opinion that they 'butted in' where there was no occasion to butt".

This debate was - literally - washed away in the flood of 1919 and the deepening crisis of the influenza pandemic across the district. While the battle of letters raged Nurse O'Keefe of Duranbah along with Nurse Dickinson, who had both volunteered to attend patients at Tyalgum, kept on with their work.

To give the *Tweed Daily* credit where it is due, their efforts were unstintingly praised: "During the first few days, Nurse O'Keefe had to do many things which had no place among her usual duties, but she proved equal to overcoming all difficulties. She was, indeed, a director of novices.'

Simultaneously the newspaper was listing those working as "influenza V.A.Ds." at the Tweed District Hospital: 'Nurses Vera Gill, Dinsey, Quirk, Misses Jessie Quirk, Stringer, McNamara, O'Neill (Stott's Creek), Alice Koch, Mesdames Forrest and Austin. Nurse Gill has gone to join the Mater Misericordiae Hospital at Brisbane. She finished duties at the Tweed District Hospital on Friday, and is deserving of special mention, as she was one of the first to come forward and take up duties at the hospital.

Nurses Dinsey and Quirk are both down with influenza. Valuable assistance is being lent by Nurse Hewitt, a returned nurse who was on her way to Brisbane, and other nurses are expected today." Nurse Markey's name was added the next day: "Nurse Markey, who is acting-matron, was lent by the Seventh Day Adventist Mission, and

according to the Medical Officer in charge (Dr. Goldsmid) is working 18 hours a day at the institution." The mobilization of caring resources, and the associated risks attendant on this work are self-evident.



'Murwillumbah in flood. c. 1919'.  
[Tweed Regional Museum, Photograph; Circa 1919; pp131.]

After one hundred years, the local history of the 1919 influenza pandemic deserves re-examination. There would be few, if any, people alive who have a direct memory of the invasion of pneumonic influenza and the effect it had on their own, their family's, and the community's life at large.

Nevertheless, this history should not be allowed to languish in the vaults. It is part of the path to the present- and as such deserves continued consideration and reflection, including the guidance it could provide to future public health crises.

## The case *against* anti-vaccination – some lessons from recent history.

By Ken Forster

In recent years, reflecting on my long and healthy life, I have become increasingly concerned with the growing opposition of some people to vaccination and immunisation for the control or elimination of infectious diseases.

I am in my ninety-third year, and can remember all too well when diseases such as diphtheria, scarlet fever, mumps, polio and far too many others blighted Australian communities. As a retired public health officer, I am able to look back and appreciate the great advances made in the control and, in many instances, the elimination of communicable diseases over the course of my career. These were truly spectacular advances which have provided an essential foundation for modern Australia.

In 1946, I was fortunate to obtain a position in the Tweed Shire Council as a public health officer and became responsible, in part, for the health and well-being of the Tweed Valley community. My responsibilities included recording all cases of infectious diseases, as defined under the Public Health Act, in the infectious disease register and alerting members of the public who may have been in contact with an infected person. In some cases, and depending on the disease in question, infected people needed to be kept in isolation, and their homes and public buildings fumigated. I am personally glad to see the back of those measures!

The historical records show that, within the Tweed Shire in the 1930s, 200-300 infectious disease cases were recorded each year, from a population of around 12,000. By the 1960s, following the success of immunisation campaigns, it was rare for public health officers to have to record infectious diseases. Indeed, in some years, no cases were recorded at all from a local population which had now grown to around 100,000 people.

Thanks to the tremendous advances in science and medicine, we have now gained control over diseases which were once true scourges of local communities.

Small pox has been eliminated entirely, and measles, mumps, poliomyelitis and rubella have been managed successfully through vaccination and other measures.

Why then today do some parents deny their children access to vaccinations that would enable them and other members of their community to avoid the contagions of the past? Part of the explanation lies in sincere but nevertheless terribly misguided conviction. However, there is also, I suspect, an even more troubling reason for this denial. I suspect that a significant degree of complacency is associated with the anti-vaccination movement because the parents of today have never seen the impact of the infectious diseases largely eliminated by vaccination and other measures.

My concern is that with diminished exposure to, and knowledge of, infectious diseases we are jeopardising our collective 'herd' immunity and opening a door that should never be opened – to diseases that we thought were long gone. I hope that our public health authorities and medical fraternity continue to remind us of the great benefits of vaccination – and of our responsibility as individuals to be vaccinated.

**Editor's Note:** *The Murwillumbah Historical Society acknowledges that there are diverse views on the 'anti-vaccination' movement. We thank Mr Forster for giving us the benefit of his experience and views, and welcome other contributions on this issue.*

# Poliomyelitis survivors a reminder of a dark time in our history

By Di Millar

*In this article, Di continues the public health focus of this issue with a reminder of an episode no one would wish repeated - the poliomyelitis scourge of the early 1950s.*

As recently as the mid-twentieth century, rural areas such as the Tweed carried major health risks arising from the nature of country life. As a young child, I was diagnosed as having osteomyelitis, caused by a bacterial infection, most commonly staphylococcus aureus, in the bone and bone marrow. Walking barefoot on our Terranora farm always resulted in cuts and abrasions allowing an easy entry for infections. Swelling and pain in my ankles left me unable to walk for a time in my school life and crawling everywhere was my only option. Happily, I recovered.

Children, and adults in the 1950s were not as fortunate after being infected by a highly contagious disease that attacked the central nervous system. The dread disease was poliomyelitis.

In the late 1940s cases of polio in NSW began to rise. In September 1949, there were 77 cases of the disease reported for that year to date.

However, on 20 September 1950, a young girl from Murwillumbah became the 430<sup>th</sup> case for the corresponding period in that year.

The girl was a pupil at Murwillumbah's Mount St Patrick Convent School and was on school holidays when she became ill. Government pamphlets were handed out to pupils at both the convent school and Murwillumbah High School when the new school term commenced.

During the major outbreak in the 1950s, polio caused the deaths of both children and adults. Many were left with mild to disabling paralysis - and wheelchairs, metal callipers and other forms of walking aids became an all-too common sight in the homes of afflicted polio survivors.

In 1950, children from all parts of the Tweed were falling victim to poliomyelitis in 1950. In February a five-year-old girl from Limpinwood was admitted to Tweed District Hospital. In October a four-year-old boy from Dunbible and in November an eight-year-old boy from Kingscliff were reported as cases.

By February 1951 nine cases of polio for the Richmond-Tweed Health district, including an eleven-year old boy from a farm outside Murwillumbah had been reported since the start of the year. Two older victims who lived at Wardell, a 27-year old man and a 31-year old woman, died in Lismore Base Hospital.

In May 1951 the NSW Health department reported there were 1,058 cases of polio and 70 deaths in the first four months of that year, compared to 347 cases and 13 for the same period in 1950. Two months later the number of reported cases had climbed to 1,305.

On February 20, 1952 a 40-year-old man and a ten-year-old girl were admitted to Tweed District Hospital. The young girl was Doreen Margaret Vidler of Eungella and she was suffering from bulbar poliomyelitis, the most severe form of the disease.

On February 29, a Butler Air Transport plane rushed an iron lung from Sydney to Coolangatta in an effort to save Doreen's life. Five seats were removed from the plane's main cabin to allow workmen to lash the 500-pound (226 kg) iron lung securely in position. The machine was a new type loaned by the American Society - which had two iron lungs in Sydney that could be put into operation within 20 minutes.

Doreen Vidler's life was prolonged for several days but on Sunday March 2 she died. Harold Frederick Vidler, who was now living at Bray Park, his two sons and two daughters were faced with the task of saying goodbye to a loved daughter and sister. Doreen's mother, Sarah Janet Vidler, had died on December 23, 1943. Doreen's funeral was held in All saints Church of England, Murwillumbah, and she was buried in the new general cemetery in Old Lismore Road.

Three cases of polio occurred in the Eungella district and, in all, eight cases were reported on the Tweed by the end of March 1952. Following the widespread polio epidemic early in that year, no more Tweed cases occurred until early December when a 16-year-old Mooball boy and an 85-year-old man from Dungay were reported.

Mass vaccination against polio was started in Australia in 1956 and I still remember standing in line at school waiting my turn for the "jab".

Since the late 1980's Rotary International and its partners have taken a leading role in the fight for the worldwide eradication of polio. Tweed-based clubs involved in this life-changing project included Mt Warning AM, Murwillumbah, Murwillumbah Central, Kingscliff, Coolangatta/Tweed heads, Tweed Heads South and Tweed Coast.

Over 30 years of commitment have resulted in Rotary International and partners edging closer to reaching this goal and have helped to drastically reduce cases.

However, in certain parts of the world, eradicating polio is proving difficult and the three countries where it remains endemic are Afghanistan, Nigeria and Pakistan. Unfortunately, there has also been a recent outbreak of the polio virus in New Guinea.

Many people are unaware of the ongoing health problems for polio survivors from those dark days of the 1940s and 1950s. In the acute disease, the polio virus attacks the motor neurons resulting in varying degrees of muscle paralysis and weakness. The brainstem is also affected in

the initial infection and muscles that appeared unaffected can suffer weakness as the polio survivor ages.

Triggers for this condition include trauma and surgery. Less commonly attributed to the late effects of polio are problems with swallowing and breathing. There are no proven medications currently available to prevent or reverse muscular atrophy, improve neuromuscular strength or relieve the neuromuscular fatigue of late effects polio. For many polio victims, surviving was only the beginning of their life's struggle as they face increasing problems during their aging process.

The tragic consequences of polio in the Tweed, Australia and around the world are pointed reminders of the need for continuing efforts to completely eliminate the disease.



## “FIRSTTHERE IS A MOUNTAIN” – CHANGING VISUAL REPRESENTATIONS OF WOLLOMBIN/MT WARNING

By Phil Strickland

When the British folk singer Donovan wrote *First There is a Mountain* in 1967 he could almost have been writing about Wollumbin/Mt Warning. The mountain was, in its incarnation as the Tweed Volcano, literally *first* in the Tweed when it erupted 23 million years ago. It then became a prime mover in forming the district’s landscape. Although worn down by natural processes, Wollumbin continues to tower over the Tweed, literally and metaphorically. The mountain has shaped how people have perceived and relate to the district, and in doing so has helped shape our local history.

Any history is of course not written by documents alone. The historical record is also preserved in painting and drawing, audio, photographic and film material, and poetry – and other media. The visual arts have been particularly important in shaping how people have perceived and identify Murwillumbah and the Tweed. This human process has also been underway continuously since the Tweed region was settled by First Peoples more than 60,000 years ago, through the colonial era in the nineteenth century and into modern times.

The imagery of Wollumbin says a great deal about the history of Murwillumbah and the Tweed and how its residents and visitors have related to a unique landscape. The art of the mountain has encompassed reflective, contemplative and boldly experimental visual representations – as well as the art of the everyday. If people were forced to choose just one meme for the Murwillumbah and Tweed District, it would almost certainly be that of Wollumbin/Mt Warning.

Indeed, the choice of many Murwillumbah commercial, educational and government institutions to put an instantly recognisable image of Wollumbin in their corporate insignia underlines the extent to which the Mountain symbolises the town. The results of even a cursory internet search reflects the thriving trade in paintings and photos of Wollumbin.

There is little wonder in this, as the mountain and its sister peaks along the rim of the Tweed Caldera rank among the most imposing landscapes in this country. There are myriad images of Wollumbin and a short article such as this cannot address all the issues they raise – but a sense of the dimensions of what they say about our local history, and the Tweed today, can be conveyed by the work of three visual artists, one from the colonial and early Federation years, and two contemporary.

*Mt. Warning Landscape* [see [Image 1](#)] was painted by Thomas Dean (1857-1947) in 1906 at a site very close to what became the location of the Tweed Regional Gallery and Margaret Olley Art Centre in Mistral Road almost a hundred years later. Brett Adlington wrote in 2001 that in this work:

“a cleared park-like setting gives way to the mystical looking Mt Warning in the background. The inclusion of herds of cattle became a visual tool in early Australian art to indicate rural wealth and the taming of the wilderness. Many artists used livestock as a metaphor for the taming of a wild and unforgiving land”.

According to Adlington, Dean “no doubt” employed the motif of cattle “for similar reasons” – to show how the conquest of the wilderness created prosperity. In short, in this interpretation painting was a tool of colonial and early Federation capitalism! Whether or not that was the case, Dean’s work was set firmly within a pastoral tradition.

Dean himself was a very interesting character. He emigrated to Australia in 1877, and worked as a railway fletcher – responsible for maintaining rail tracks and other railway equipment. This was an interesting background for a presumed exponent of capitalism via art. Impressively, Dean submitted his last work to the Archibald Prize competition in 1939 at the age of 81.

A very different perspective on Wollumbin was offered by the contemporary artist Hobie Porter in 2009 [see **Images 2** and **3**], in which the environmental consciousness of the early twenty-first century was prominent. Susi Muddiman wrote that Porter “sets the scene of our environmental future in a subtle, meditative, yet anxious way”. Porter’s work addressed “the impact of human civilisation on the land” in ways which mirrored “our own tentative relationship with the environment”.

Another, and very patient, representation of Wollumbin was developed by the Murwillumbah photographic artist Justin Ealand between 2015 and 2018 [see **Image 3**]. Over these years Ealand took a photo of Wollumbin at the same time on most mornings from a site at Far-rants Hill in the Tweed. Ealand saw his project as “honouring the start of the day” and took great pains to come up with a different way of shooting the mountain. As with Porter’s work,

a strong sense of environmental consciousness underlies Ealand’s Wollumbin series.

Wollumbin is a local and Australia icon, but a most interesting aspects of Ealand’s work is the projection, via the Internet and Instagram, of Wollumbin to the international community. Through Instagram, people around the world tuned in to Ealand’s daily narrative of Wollumbin. Some of them told Ealand that Wollumbin came to represent “more than a mountain to them” and that they had come to “see the face of the man in the mountain”.

There are probably as many perspectives on Wollumbin as there are residents in, and visitors to, Murwillumbah and the Tweed. We would be glad to hear from you about your reflections on the mountain, including how it relates to Murwillumbah’s own history

**Image 1:** Thomas Dean  
*Mt Warning landscape* 1906  
oil on canvas  
86 x 196cm  
Gift of Mrs Veema Williams, 1992  
Tweed Regional Gallery collection



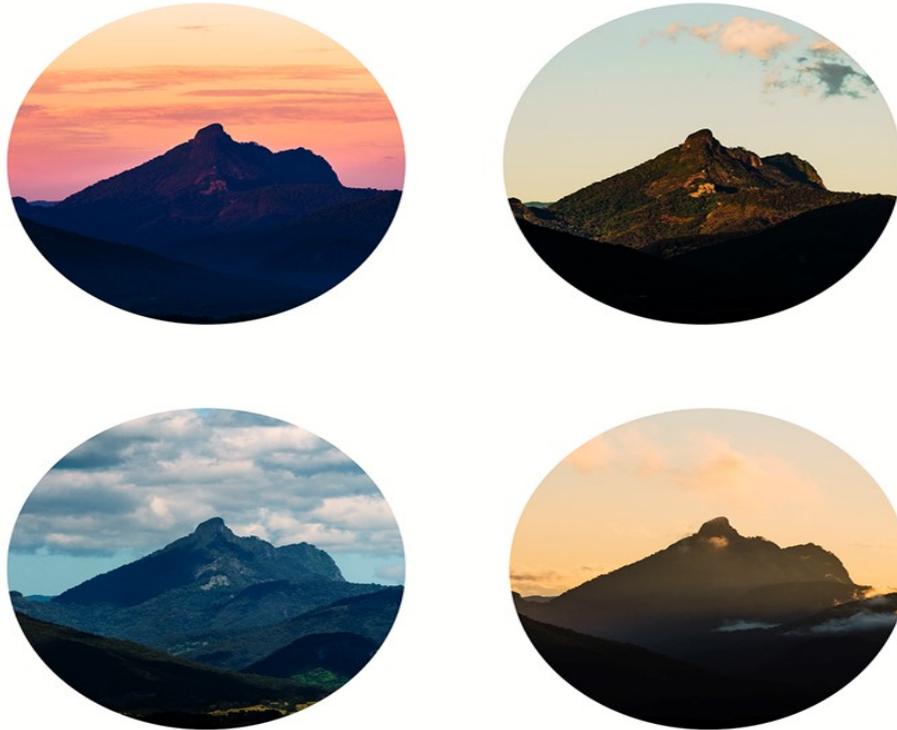
**Image 2:**Hobie Porter  
*Deluge*  
oil on linen  
2008  
(A view from the summit of Wollumbin)



**Image 3:**Hobie Porter  
*Third Study for Dry Rain*  
oil on linen  
2008  
(Wollumbin in the distance)



**Image 4:** 'Wollumbin X 4 2018' by Justin Ealand.



**ABOUT THE SOCIETY:** Formed on 16 March 1959, the Society's aim is to research, preserve and promote the rich and unique history of our town of Murwillumbah and its surrounds in the picturesque Tweed River Valley of far northern New South Wales. The Society operates out of our Research Centre in the Tweed Regional Museum's historic Murwillumbah facility. The Society is proudly supported by the Tweed Regional Museum, a community facility of Tweed Shire Council.

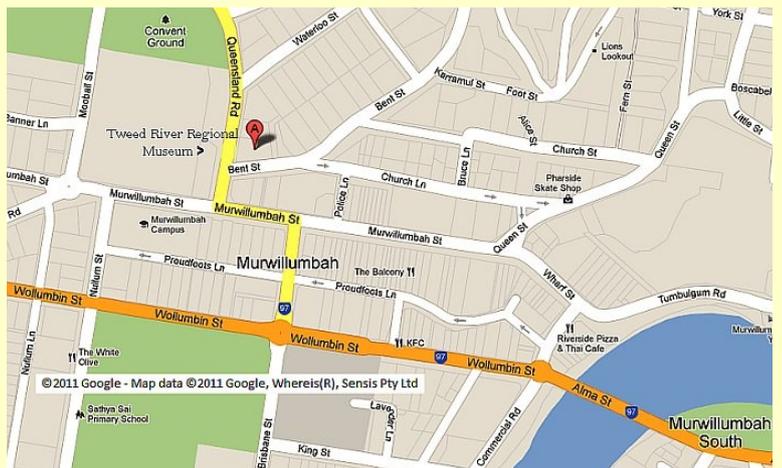
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**ABOUT THE MUSEUM:** The Tweed Regional Museum is a Tweed Shire Council community facility, established in 2004, with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between Tweed Shire Council and the Murwillumbah, Tweed Heads and Uki and South Arm Historical Societies. It is one museum that operates across three branch locations; Murwillumbah, Tweed Heads and Uki, and in association with these three local Historical Societies. The three locations connect the Tweed Shire from the coast to the mountains, providing a unique journey into the history, people and places of the majestic Tweed Valley.

For information about the Tweed Regional Museum please visit: <http://museum.tweed.nsw.gov.au/> or phone on (02) 6670 2493.