

TIMELINES

In fifteen minutes

Number 20

Desperately seeking – a treasurer!

Murwillumbah Historical Society needs a new treasurer. Please consider volunteering with the Society and filling the role of our financial director. The work is not onerous.

Upcoming event



Our readers will have received an invitation to Ms Norma Mann's presentation titled 'History and Culture of Northern Rivers' Settlers with Indian Ancestry'. This will be held on Monday, 31 March 2025, at 10:00 am. The venue is the Murwillumbah Services Club, 10 Wollumbin St., Murwillumbah. Following the talk, enjoy lunch from our selected menu. To ensure your spot, please RSVP by 24th March 2025 to Betty Hamill on mobile 0458 793 223 or email to brianbettyhamill@gmail.com.

Norma Mann (née Singh) with her brothers Ray and Ted.

(Source: Tweed Regional Museum Collection.)

The meeting

On Wednesday, 26 February 2025 the President, Bev Fairley attended the first meeting of the Tweed Regional Museum Management Committee (formerly the Advisory Committee), which was held in the Museum. In the words of the Museum Director, the transition from Advisory to Management Committee means that 'this group will play a crucial role in providing operational support, considered advice, and strategic recommendations to ensure TRM continues to grow, engage, and innovate'. In this spirit, the Society is happy to listen to your comments about the Tweed Regional Museum and be an advocate when appropriate.

Our next meeting – the Annual General Meeting

The Society's Annual General Meeting (AGM) will be held on Monday, 28 April 2025 at 1:00 pm at the Murwillumbah Services Club. Members will be receiving the agenda and a request to renew their membership in the near future. (Please note that members who have joined the Society since November 2024 will be considered financial members for the 2025/2026 year.) The Society warmly welcomes new members, and new memberships will be accepted at the AGM prior to the commencement of the meeting. The first committee meeting for 2025/2026 will be held following the AGM.

Annual General Meeting.

1:00 pm on Monday, 28 April 2025, at the Murwillumbah Services Club.

CONTACT US: Phone: (02) 6670 2273

At the Museum: Tuesday and Thursday from 10:00 am – 2:00 pm and Wednesday and Friday 10:00 am to 3:00 pm

Web: <http://www.murwillumbahhistoricalsociety.org.au>

FB: <http://www.facebook.com/murwillumbahhistory>

Email: editor@murwillumbahhistoricalsociety.org.au

Mail: c/- Tweed Regional Museum, 2 Queensland Rd, Murwillumbah NSW 2484 or PO Box 373, Murwillumbah NSW 2484

History in a Box

The Cyclone – a story from 1950

The January 2021 issue of *Timelines* had an article titled '[The Cudgen Cyclone](#)'. Betty Hamill told the story of how her father, Hec Robertson, earned himself a mention in the newspapers of the time, rescuing his cousin's daughter who had become trapped in a bedroom. Betty wrote of that day, Friday, 23 June 1950, as follows:

'Our neighbour in Cudgen Road, Mr Fred Hughes watched as [the cyclone] hit our family house with full force.

The first sign of trouble was the lino lifting off the floor. Our father, Hec Robertson, quickly gathered our mother Ena, his mother Lizzie, cousin Freda and the three girls, Lynne, Nancy and Betty into the relative safety of the hallway. Gran bent over and shielded me with her body because, by now, events were happening fast.

The entire house was in the air and moving towards Kingscliff, only to reverse and head back towards Cudgen. The cyclone then dumped our flying house and us heavily enough to force the stumps up through the floor in many places. It moved on with roofing and other articles in tow. The resting place for the house was eight feet closer to Cudgen than its original site. The sun came out. Everything was eerily quiet until we heard a weak voice calling for help. Freda's daughter, Jacqueline, had been missed in the quick round-up and was trapped in a bedroom. She had been knocked unconscious. Coming to in a panic, she thought she was the only one left alive.

The bedroom door was jammed, so Dad ran to the back door only to find the steps were destroyed. He jumped down and was able to reach the bedroom window because the house was now lower.

Jacqueline was not seriously hurt but quite frightened. Inside, the room had been swirled around as if by a giant hand. The mattress had slid onto the floor and the wardrobe had fallen on top of it. Other furniture was rearranged.

About this time, Mr Hughes ran up ashen-faced, expecting us to all be dead.

The kitchen, where the ladies had been working minutes before, was full of bricks from the double chimney between the kitchen and lounge room. Much of the roof had blown off and many windows were broken.

Next door, our grandfather, Jim Robertson had been sitting at the dining room table and reading and moved when the wind started. The window opposite blew in and shards of glass were embedded in the wall behind where he had been. Damage to their house was less than ours, but still substantial.'

The Brisbane *Courier-Mail's* headline on Saturday was 'Trail of Damage on Coast', with the following description of what had happened at Cudgen: 'Township got full blast.

The small township of Cudgen, near Murwillumbah caught the full blast of the cyclone yesterday morning.

Sixty-mile-an-hour winds unroofed seven houses and lifted two from their stumps, smashing them completely.

Damage in the township is estimated at £20,000.

After the cyclone left Brisbane flooded at midnight, it moved slowly southwards, sweeping the coast with winds and rain.

It passed over the border about 9.30 a.m., hit Cudgen an hour later, and reached Lismore at 1 p.m.'

The *Queensland Times* reported that same day:

'Terrifying Ordeal in Freak Cyclone

Murwillumbah, June 23.

A young girl, trapped alone in a room, when a freak cyclone struck the small farming community of Cudgen, on the Lower Tweed, this morning, screamed in terror as the house was lifted from its blocks, thrown 8ft. sideways and dumped back on the ground.

The brick fireplace in the house collapsed, and a shower of bricks cascaded into the kitchen, narrowly missing the occupants, who fled into the open.

Jacqueline Sleath (15) was alone in a room at the home of Mr. H. Robertson, when the tornado struck. As the house tilted Mr. Robertson helped her through a window.

The blow, which caused damage estimated at £20,000, wrecked four homes, devastated farmlands, and crops.

Owners of other houses blown down were Mr. Robertson, sen., Mr. W. Peate, and Mr. J. H. Peate.

At Mr. J. H. Peate's farm, a shed which housed a car and truck was ripped in two.

One wall was flung 100 yards east, and the other was hurled into a paddock in a different direction. The roofing iron disappeared into the scrub several hundred yards away.'

On Monday, *The Courier Mail's* page 3 headline was 'Cyclone left vast inland sea in norther N.S.W.', with flood photos of Murwillumbah and Lismore to prove the point.

An editorial note: The Editor of *Timelines* and *Timelines In fifteen minutes* endeavours to ensure the accuracy of information in published articles. Where possible, families are contacted to avoid errors with names and relationships. As the Society's President pointed out at the last committee meeting: "Talking to families is not difficult and they do appreciate it."